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PINK FLOYD

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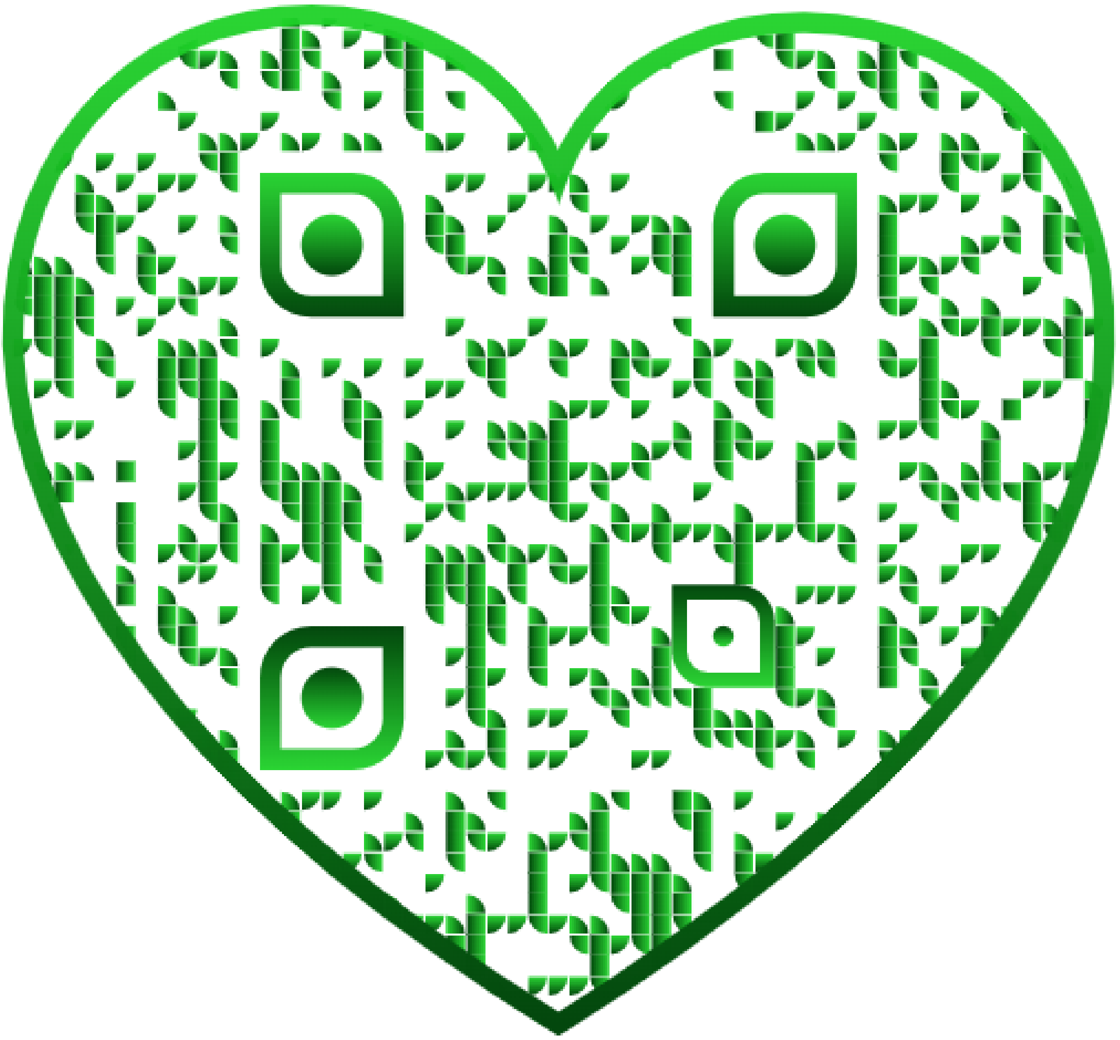

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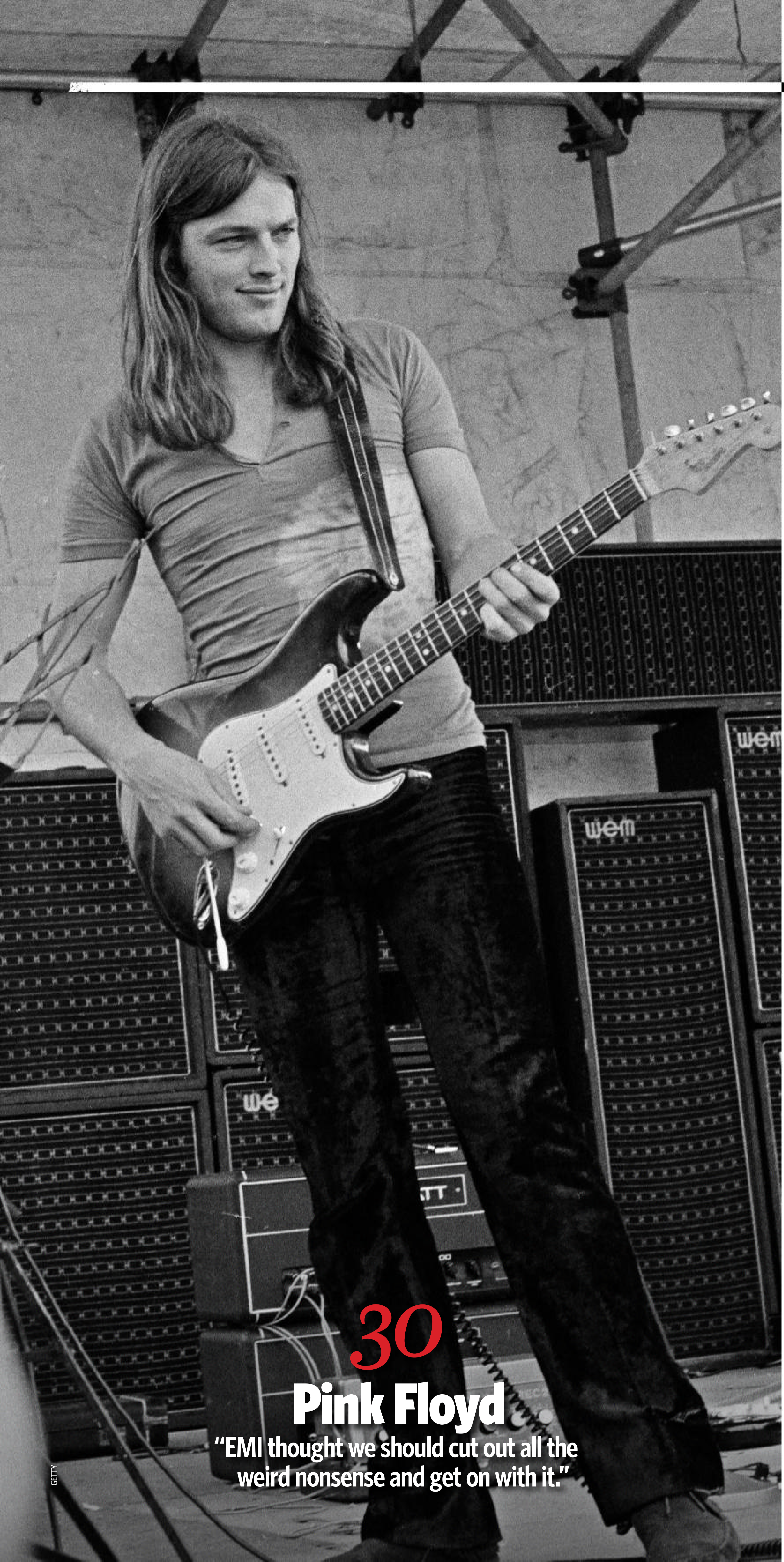

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Pink Floyd

"EMI thought we should cut out all the weird nonsense and get on with it."

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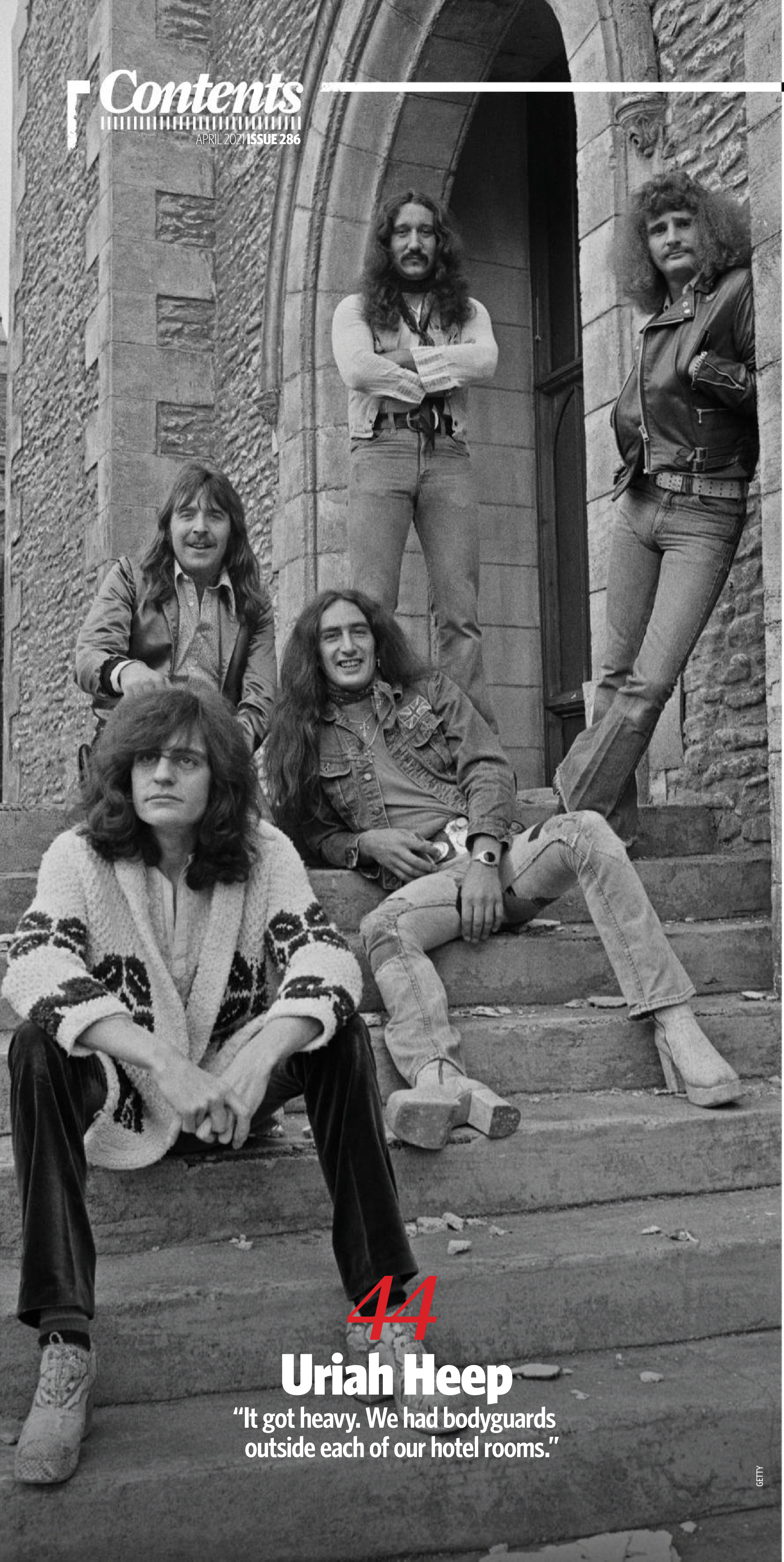

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More often than not, when the name 'Pink Floyd' is mentioned I would wager that minds immediately think of *The Dark Side Of The Moon* or *The Wall*. Or for early Floyd devotees, thoughts might turn to Syd Barrett. But what about that fertile period post-Syd and pre-*Dark Side*? It's an intriguing time for a band who were struggling to get to grips with the loss of their guiding light and principal songwriter; who threw themselves into soundtrack work to try to get a steer on where to go next; who were getting their heads around the emergence of Roger Waters as a songwriter and the ascendance of David Gilmour as a singer and player... It was a time of flux before things went absolutely stratospheric when they released *Dark Side* on an unsuspecting world. And it's this tumultuous period of Floyd that we visit this month.

And while I'm talking about Pink Floyd and *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, this seems like the perfect opportunity to remind you to check out *Classic Rock*'s podcast *The 20 Million Club*. Hosted by Nicky Horne, it's where we take a deep dive into albums that have sold 20 million copies or more. *Dark Side* has gone under the microscope already, as have AC/DC's *Back In Black*, Queen's *Greatest Hits*, Meat Loaf's *Bat Out Of Hell* and more. All episodes in season one are available now from wherever you get your podcasts.

Siân Llewellyn, Editor

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This month's contributors

PAUL BRANNIGAN
Being home alone for two months has given Paul Brannigan no end of writing time; expect his Eddie Van Halen biography *Eruption* and a tenth-anniversary update of his Dave Grohl biog *This Is A Call* later in 2021. This month we welcome him back to the pages of *Classic Rock* as he digs deep into the making of the defining Uriah Heep album *Demons And Wizards* (p46).

MARK BLAKE
Mark Blake is the author of the definitive Pink Floyd biography *Pigs Might Fly* (available from all good booksellers!), and this issue he writes about their long, strange trip towards their landmark album *The Dark Side Of The Moon* (p30). *Us And Them*, his authorised biography of Pink Floyd's colourful sleeve designers Hipgnosis, is due in 2022.

IAN FORTNAM
Young Ian led an unremarkable, blameless life prior to July 13, 1972, but the sight of Alice Cooper on *Top Of The Pops* changed all that. Suddenly all hope of academic success was immediately sacrificed on the altar of rock'n'roll debauchery. Three decades later he arrived at *Classic Rock* with his whip and pet python and became our Reviews Editor. For this issue he talks to Alice (p52).

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Live Music: Where Are We Now?

And post-Brexit, can touring Europe survive?

Words: **Polly Glass** & **Dave Ling**

It was the announcement that, in recent weeks, had come to feel inevitable. Rumours were swatted away and ticket-holders crossed their fingers, but in the end it wasn't a big surprise to learn that Glastonbury, the colossus in Britain's summer festival calendar, would be cancelled for a second consecutive year due to ongoing Covid restrictions.

As co-organiser Emily Eavis told the *Guardian*, the decision reflected "everything from restrictions on public transport capacities to availability of the medical staff we need to work at the event, to the simple fact that mass gatherings are currently still legally prohibited and it's not at all clear when that will be reversed."

Following the news of the Glastonbury cancellation, many music lovers immediately resigned themselves to a second summer without festivals. The *New York Times* quoted Olivier Garnier, spokesman for France's Hellfest (set for June 18-20) as saying: "It's sent a very bad signal".

Elsewhere, a measure of optimism prevailed. The Download Festival (set for June 4-6) tweeted: "Rest assured we're continuing to work behind the scenes to get ready for Download this summer and hope to have more news for you by March 1." (Download booker Andy Copping declined our request for further comment.)

For starters, the cancellation of Glastonbury doesn't automatically mean the rest will fall. A uniquely gargantuan operation, the Worthy Farm bonanza hosts around 210,000 people on a huge site that takes weeks to assemble. By this logic, smaller festivals that take place later in the year, and require less time and work to get ready, might stand a chance of going ahead.

For Rachael Greenfield, director of the Bloodstock Festival (scheduled for August 11-15), with a comparatively small capacity of 20,000, the outlook is of quiet confidence. But the question of whether covid transmission rates will go down sufficiently to allow restrictions to be lifted remains pivotal, as does the safety of staff and festival goers.

"We are currently planning for this year's festival to proceed," Greenfield tells us. "We are quietly confident that the vaccine roll-out will

The roar of the crowd: something to look forward to.

TOP RIGHT INSET: KANE HIBBERD; CENTRE INSET: KATJA OGRIN

have a hugely positive impact quite quickly to see events resume later this year without social distancing, but likely with other measures to help keep transmission of this virus at bay. However, we have to prepare for all eventualities and will take whatever guidance the Government and Public Health put forward."

In Germany, organisers of the Wacken Open Air Festival (July 29-31, capacity 75,000) are also treating it as business as usual for now.

"Our entire team is at full speed on implementing this year's edition of Wacken Open Air," co-founder Thomas Jensen says. "We hope that the government measures take effect and that a return to live events will be possible this summer. The development of vaccines makes us confident and the numerous positive messages from our fans give us a lot of strength."

While welcomed, it isn't clear what the roll-out of vaccinations – which rightly prioritises the elderly, the vulnerable and key workers – will mean for prospective festival goers. Who will be covid-immune in time for which events, if anyone? How much of a difference, in real terms, will it make?

"How many of those people [who've been vaccinated] are going to Bloodstock or Download?" asks Gez Walton, front-of-house engineer/tour manager for artists including Michael Monroe and Orange Goblin. "With the eighty thousand that are going to be in a field at Download [full capacity: 110,000], what's changed apart from maybe twenty per cent of them have been vaccinated?

"I'm cautiously optimistic about what 2021 can deliver, but I am a realist about it," he adds. "The bigger [events], we might not see them until next year. I'm prepared for that."

Perhaps the obstacle most frequently cited – and at the centre of a recent parliamentary inquiry hearing into the future of British music festivals – has been the lack of provision of covid-cover insurance.

The British government has provided £1.57billion of direct support for arts across the UK, which last year saw more than 1,385 venues benefit from a £257million grant. So far, however, it has resisted committing to an insurance scheme that would provide cover for festivals, with a Department For Digital, Culture, Media & Sport spokesperson citing the need to agree on "a realistic return date for festivals and other large events".

But it's an exasperating situation. How does one commit to "a realistic return date" without first being assured of financial security in the event of another cancellation? It is this lack of cover, festival organisers argue, that is making advance preparations so problematic.

"It's definitely more about all the smaller and independent bands and artists, clubs and venues."

Thomas Jensen, Wacken co-founder

This is in contrast to the £500million Film & TV Production Restart Scheme, launched last year to cover covid-related insurance costs. Elsewhere, the German government has announced a 2.5 billion euro (£2.3bn) fund to cover event cancellation costs, while recently Austria started an insurance scheme to cover events that cannot be rescheduled.

"There will definitely be casualties this year with some festivals unable to return if this year's events are postponed yet again," Greenfield says. "The Government needs to act now to underwrite event insurance to include covid to reduce the financial risk on festivals. Germany and other European countries have already supported their festivals by doing this. The UK has a world-leading reputation when it comes to the array of festivals we host and this needs to be safeguarded by our government."

"There's a lack of clarity about how we go ▷

This month The Dirt was compiled by Lee Dorrian, Polly Glass, Rob Hughes, Emma Johnston, Jo Kendall, Fraser Lewry, Dave Ling, Henry Yates

Through his company Route One Booking, Orange Goblin's Ben Ward has made the first serious attempt by any booking agency to plan and execute a post-covid full tour.

forward," Steelhouse festival promoters Mikey Evans and Max Rhead inform us. "That being said, we have a bill, we have our dates and currently we're working towards Steelhouse going ahead this year [scheduled for July 23-25, capacity 7,500]. Of course, there are challenges. The health and safety of everyone – audience, artists, crew and volunteers – is paramount, but we'll do our very best to meet those challenges.

"We have been able to access grant support from the Welsh Government, which has been very welcome," they continue. "The Major Events Unit at Visit Wales have also been a great help – their words of support, guidance and enthusiasm for Steelhouse Festival has been very much appreciated."

Still, what happens if – and it's still a big 'if' – Britain's 2021 festival season is another write-off? Will they be able to come back in 2022? Speaking at the aforementioned parliamentary inquiry hearing into the future of British music festivals, Anna Wade, director of communications and strategy for Boomtown Fair, said: "It is unlikely that most events or festivals could weather the storm of no event happening in 2021".

But festival organiser Emily Eavis has rebuked speculation that Glastonbury could go bankrupt after a second no-show year, despite the festival having lost £5m after cancelling in March 2020. "We would have been in trouble if we'd hedged our bets and pushed on regardless to March and then had to cancel," she said. "We'd have spent a lot of money by then – money which we wouldn't get back."

And then of course there are all the artists. What would it mean for them? For many bands, festivals are a massive part of any promotional cycle, and a golden opportunity, especially for emerging artists, to grow their fan base.

"If you're a support band on a tour and you play a festival, you're not playing to just the fans of the band you're supporting," says Gez Walton. "There's a curiosity, people coming to check out developing artists. So they're important for any developing artist for that reason; you get to play for a much wider audience."

Is it possible to say what it might mean for bands and crews if 2021 is another write-off?

"I think the playing field would be different in twenty-two if twenty-one is a write-off," Walton offers. "What that means I don't know exactly, but it goes across all levels: what risks promoters might want to take, what line-ups will look like, the size of festivals… It's such an unknown."

"It's definitely more about all the smaller and independent bands and artists, clubs and venues," Wacken's Thomas Jensen says, when asked if we should be worried about the future of festivals. "On top we must pay attention to all the hundreds and thousands of people working in different branches in the music and live industry who are currently massively affected."

What happens next will be extremely telling. There's a strong feeling that musicians and their community have been sold down the river by the government's Brexit trade agreement. Unless something can be done to amend the appropriate clauses, the effect on touring as we know it, especially for non-European artists touring mainland Europe, will be nothing less than catastrophic.

By the time you read this, booker Andy Copping expects to have delivered more news about this year's Download.

The new rules now make it far harder, complicated and expensive to organise tours from the UK using large vehicles, and costly work visas will be required by artists and crew for protracted stays in the 27 EU countries. Visa waivers for artists and support crews would represent a huge step forward, as would simplified border restrictions. But already some of the larger trucking companies who specialise in concert touring are looking to move part of their operation to the EU to enable them to function.

In the House Of Commons, Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden told MPs that the situation "could have been solved" before the deadline of January 1 and blamed the EU. Brussels said that a deal to cut red tape and allow visits of up to 90 days was declined by the UK government, citing "freedom of movement" issues.

High-profile artists including Roger Waters,

> **"The deal done with the EU has a gaping hole where the promised free movement for musicians should be."**
>
> **From a letter to *The Times* signed by 100 musicians**

WILL IRELAND x2

Sign of the times: the Black Heart in London is one of many venues in the UK fighting for survival.

Fish has outlined some of the increased costs for artists touring Europe post-Brexit.

Elton John, Robert Plant, Iron Maiden, Roger Daltrey, Brian May and Roger Taylor, Rick Wakeman and Radiohead have rallied for the government to rethink its stance on visa-free touring across the EU. A letter to *The Times* signed by 100 musicians said: "British musicians, dancers, actors and their support staff have been shamefully failed by their government. The deal done with the EU has a gaping hole where the promised free movement for musicians should be." It summed up: "This negotiating failure will tip many performers over the edge."

Culture Minister Caroline Dinenage promised: "As a government, we will engage with bilateral partners to find ways to make life easier for those working in the creative industries in countries across the EU."

However, freelance camera director Tim Brennan, who set up a petition signed by 284,069 people, believes that the issue has been "shunted into the irrelevant sidings of post-Brexit immigration policy".

In a lengthy essay titled 'How Brexit Has Destroyed UK Artists' Ability To Tour In The EU', Fish revealed that in Holland alone, for example, the administration and processing costs of permits will cost approximately £250 per person for his touring party, usually 10: six musicians, a back-line tech, a sound engineer, a lighting and projection tech and a production manager. Which means permits alone would cost an additional £2,500 for each EU country that he performs in. "This doesn't even take in the issues of carnets [customs permits], and the costs and time required for the paperwork to cover every individual piece of equipment that we take with us," he says.

In another unnerving development, livestream gig events are now the subject of a revised licensing fee. In December, the Performing Rights Society proposed a new, significantly increased tariff on gross earnings from gigs. Incredibly, they are also being backdated to collect fees from streams that took place in 2020. Organisers of shows raising £250 will have to pay the PRS £22.50 plus VAT, regardless of whether takings are more than that figure. The fee doubles for events grossing between £251 and £500.

Meanwhile, because of lockdown throughout the pandemic, more venues around the UK have been plunged into uncertainty. Trillians Rock Bar in Newcastle has launched a GoFundMe page in a bid to raise the £50,000 that would prevent closure. London venue the Black Heart is on a similar quest for survival, after receiving what they say is "zero help from the government or our landlords".

> **"The UK has a world-leading reputation when it comes to the array of festivals we host, and this needs to be safeguarded by our Government."**
>
> **Rachael Greenfield, Bloodstock director**

On the upside, Orange Goblin frontman Ben Ward, who is also a co-founder of the company Route One Booking, has set up a full UK tour for two of the acts on his roster, nine fully socially distanced concerts in May this year that will feature King Creature and Blind River. They represent the first serious attempt by any booking agency to plan and execute a post-covid full tour, as opposed to one-off events.

King Creature and Blind River can be seen at Southampton 1865 May 23, Liverpool Hangar 34 24, Newcastle University 25, Milton Keynes Craufurd Arms 26, Norwich Brickmakers 27, London Great Portland Street 229 Club 28, Bristol The Lanes 30, Birmingham Asylum 31 and Plymouth Junction June 1. With substantially reduced audience numbers, they are expected to sell out fast.

Elsewhere, bigger bands continue to delay upcoming tours – quite often by as 12 months or more – and cross their fingers in hope.

In terms of how successful the current restrictions have been in driving down covid infections in Britain, Boris Johnson has stated that "the overall picture should be clearer by mid-February". For festivals this could mean signs of when they can take place again safely.

In the meantime, the live music industry and fans alike wait with cautious optimism and anticipation for when events can staged again in the usual way, whenever that may be.

"Live music is the cathartic release that everyone is desperately craving to heal the wounds we've all endured through this pandemic," says Bloodstock's Rachael Greenfield. "When the doors are allowed to open again, we and the music industry will be ready."

"I'm absolutely a hundred per cent confident that it will come back," says Gez Walton. "And when the green light is given, and the confidence of the public is restored, it will be very special. It's like: '2021? Hanging in the balance.' But '2022? Phwoar!'"

FISH: KEVIN NIXON; BLACK HEART: ALAMY

RIP

Thank you and good night.

Stefan Cush

Died February 5, 2021

The co-lead vocalist and guitarist of the folk-punk group The Men They Couldn't Hang has died following a sudden heart attack. Of Irish and Welsh descent, Stefan Cush started out as a roadie for The Pogues, whose own frontman Spider Stacy said that he was "cut from a strong and excellent cloth." Cush was 60 years old.

Tom Stevens

September 17, 1956 – January 23, 2021

Born in Indiana and classically trained, Tom Stevens was a bassist, singer and songwriter for the Los Angeles-based psychedelic-tinged alt.country group The Long Ryders, who released three albums and an EP during the 1980s. Cause of death was unknown though a band statement said that Tom's passing was "sudden". Stevens was 64.

Anne Feeney

July 1, 1951 – February 3, 2021

Best known for her anthem for civil disobedience, *Have You Been To Jail For Justice?*, which was covered by Peter, Paul & Mary, Feeney carved a career that combined folk music and activism in addition to working as a lawyer. A daughter of first-generation Irish immigrants, the 69-year-old died of the Coronavirus.

Phil Spector

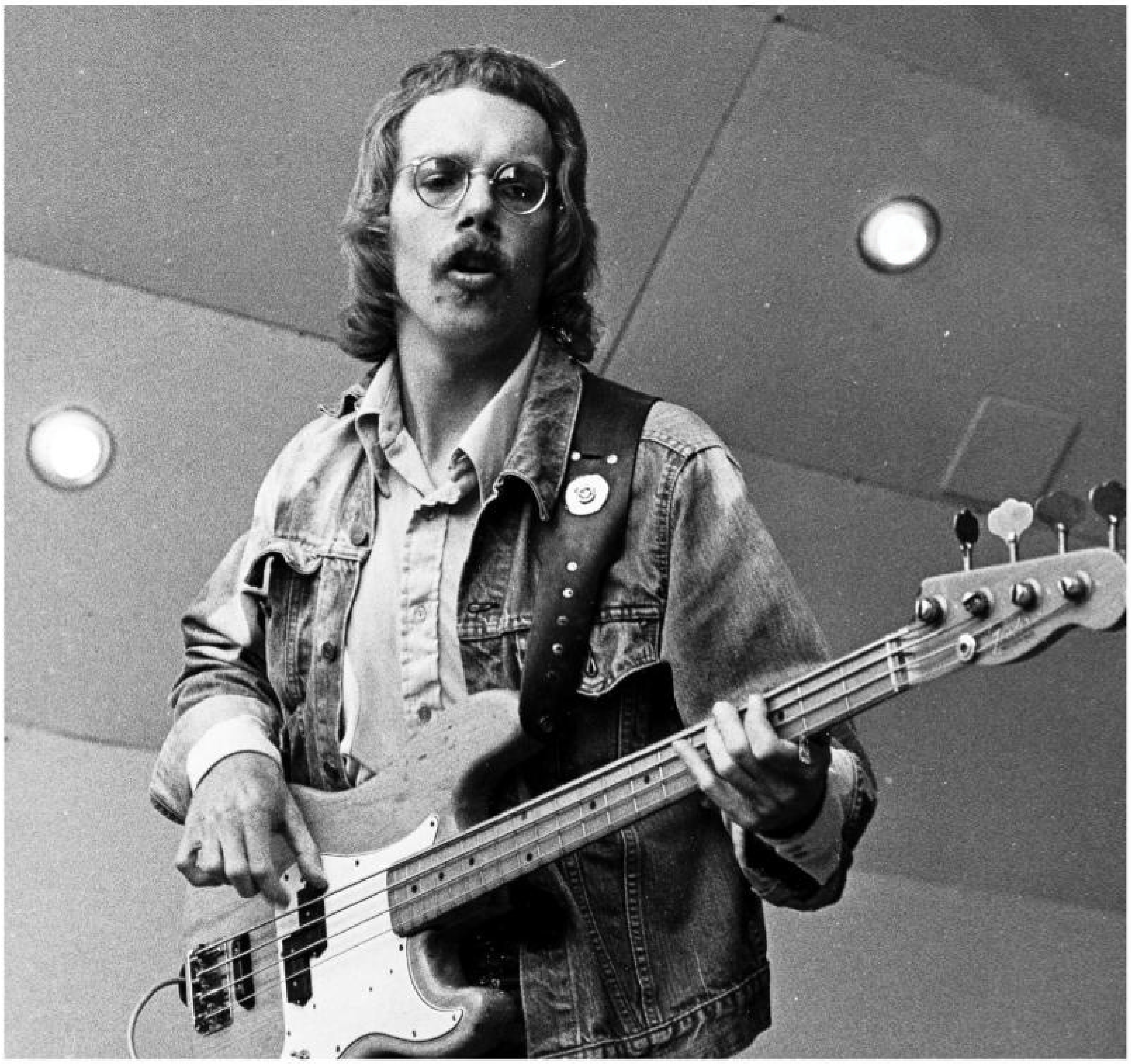
December 26, 1939 – January 16, 2021

The American record producer, musician and songwriter has died of complications related to Covid-19 in jail at the age of 81. He was convicted of the murder of actress Lana Clarkson in 2009. During his musical career Spector developed a technique called The Wall Of Sound and applied it to music made for and with The Beatles, The Righteous Brothers, The Ronettes, The Ramones and many more.

Michael Fonfara

August 11, 1946 – January 8, 2021

The classically taught Canadian musician made a name with The Electric Flag and Rhinoceros before receiving the call to join the backing band of Lou Reed, appearing on nine of Reed's albums between 1974 and 2005. He also appeared on the Foreigner hit *Urgent*. Fonfara, 74, had fought a two-year battle with cancer.



Tim Bogert

August 27, 1944 – January 13, 2021

The virtuoso bass player who worked with Vanilla Fudge, Cactus and the supergroup Beck, Bogert & Appice, has died of cancer at the age of 76. The news was broken by drummer Carmine Appice, who played alongside Bogert in all three bands. Writing on Facebook, Appice said: "My true friend Tim Bogert died today. He was like a brother to me. He was my friend for over 50 years.

"Tim was a one of a kind bass player. He inspired many, many bass players worldwide. He was as masterful at shredding as he was holding down a groove, and Tim introduced a new level of virtuosity into rock bass playing. No one played like Tim. He created bass solos that drove audiences to a frenzy every time he played one. And he played a different solo every night. He was the last of the legendary 1960s bass players.

"Tim was a very intelligent person, so intelligent that we would call him 'Spock'. You could ask him anything and he would know something about it.

"I loved Tim like a brother. I will miss calling him, cracking jokes together, talking music and remembering the great times we had together, and how we created kick-ass music together.

"Perhaps the only good thing about knowing someone close to you is suffering a serious illness, is you have an opportunity to tell them that you love them, and why you love them. I did that, a lot. I was touched to hear it said back to me. Nothing was left unsaid between us and I'm grateful for that. I highly recommend it."

Jeff Beck added: "Sad to hear the news about Tim's passing. We shared some good times together on stage and thankfully our mutual work will stand the test of time. His style was totally unique and was never properly recognised. Miss you man…"

A founding member of pioneering rockers Vanilla Fudge, Bogert played on their first five albums, *Vanilla Fudge, The Beat Goes On, Renaissance, Near The Beginning* and *Rock & Roll*. Having honed their performance on the Long Island circuit, Vanilla Fudge were a hard act to follow, as Jimi Hendrix, among others, discovered to his cost.

"We played hard and audiences liked what we were doing," Bogert told *Classic Rock*. "So we would wear an audience out. They would be spent by the time the main act came on."

Vanilla Fudge disbanded in 1970 – they reunited multiple times with various line-ups – and Bogert and Appice formed Cactus. A genuine sex-and-drugs-and-rock'n'roll experience, Cactus made Vanilla Fudge look like amateurs in the bad behaviour department. There were pot busts, nights in jail, and fistfights, and they wouldn't have had it any other way.

"I'd like to say, for the record, how grateful I am for that," Bogert told *Classic Rock*, tongue only slightly in cheek.

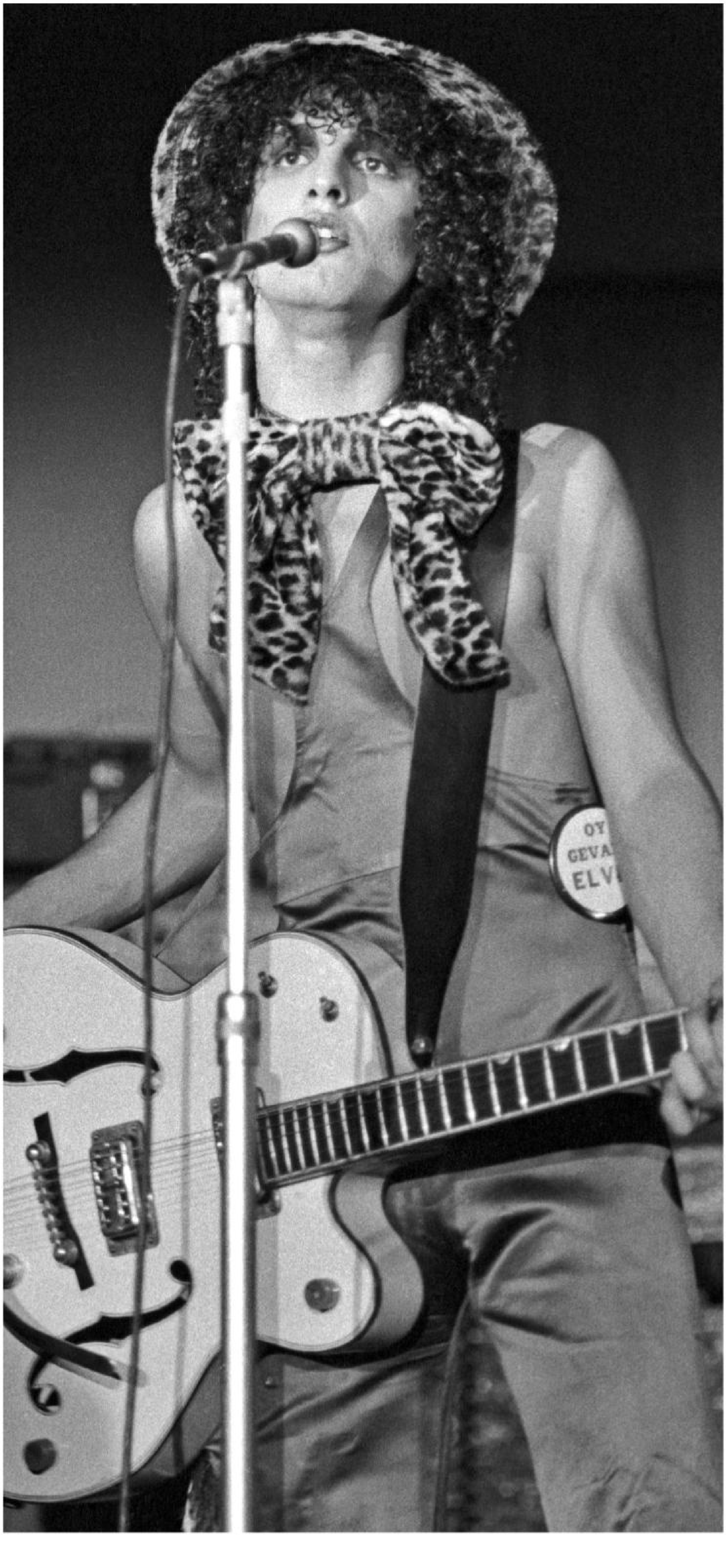
Bogert also hooked up with Appice and Jeff Beck in the supergroup Beck, Bogert & Appice in 1972. Bursting with experimental zeal, they bridged the gap between the psychedelic age and a nebulous new era where metal, hard funk, soul and heavy blues could all co-exist in one glorious tumult.

"People thought we were as good as it gets," Bogert remembered. "At the time, I did too. I thought this was going to be the best thing that ever happened to me. And for a short period of time it was."

In later years Bogert toured with the Jeff Beck Group and Bo Diddley, hooked up with The Grateful Dead's Bob Weir in his side project Bobby And The Midnites, and joined British group Boxer for their second album, *Absolutely*.

He continued to work with Appice: in CB&A with Japanese musician Char, and with Rick Derringer in DBA. More recently, the two played together with Hollywood Monsters, whose members also included current Deep Purple keyboardist Don Airey, and ex-Whitesnake bassist Neil Murray. **FL**

ALAMY



GETTY

Sylvain Sylvain

February 14, 1951 – January 13, 2021

David Johansen has paid tribute to his New York Dolls bandmate Sylvain Sylvain who recently succumbed to cancer at the age of 69. Now the band's last surviving original member, lead singer Johansen told *Rolling Stone* that the Dolls "would have been a crappy band" without Sylvain, adding: "He knew what he was doing and he could play the guitar. He came up with really great rhythms. He was very accomplished. He was a natural player. He loved playing."

Sylvain was born Sylvain Mizrahi in Cairo, Egypt, in 1951. When he was young his family fled to New York where, as a teenager, he formed The Pox with future New York Dolls bandmate Billy Murcia. The pair also featured in the band Actress, where they were joined by Johnny Thunders and Arthur Kane, morphing into the New York Dolls when Johansen joined the band.

Sylvain played with the Dolls until they broke up in 1975, appearing on the band's self-titled debut in 1973 and on *Too Much Too Soon* the following year.

After the group's dissolution Sylvain worked on a number of projects, releasing two albums under his own name, one with Syl Sylvain and the Teardrops, and two billed as With Sylvain Sylvain and The Criminal$.

In 2004 the surviving members of the Dolls (Sylvain, Johansen and Kane) reunited to perform at the Morrissey-curated Meltdown festival in London. Kane died just weeks after the show, but two years later came a third Dolls album, *One Day It Will Please Us To Remember Even This*. This was followed in 2009 by *Cause I Sez So* and *Dancing Backward In High Heels* in 2011.

In April 2019 Sylvain set up a crowd-funding campaign to raise money to pay his medical bills, revealing he'd been battling cancer.

"I have not been able to work since last year," he wrote, "and have more surgery scheduled. I love life! As hard as life has been to me these past two years, I want to live and I know with your love and support I'll have the best chance that I could ever have."

Talking in 2014, Sylvain told *Classic Rock*: "A musician's life is a lot better with money than without, but the true job of an artist is to inspire and turn people on. That's the job of an entertainer. So in those terms, you can forget everyone else. We're Number One. We were the first band out of the fucking gate in New York City, before there was anybody else.

"Getting signed was a huge wall to break down, because before the New York Dolls you had to be fucking Foghat or Led Zeppelin. And we were so fucking bored with that generation. Whole shows were built around stadium rock, and the song itself had lost its pizazz, its sex appeal. So it was a case of: if they can't deliver it, then we'll have to do it ourselves.

"I'm so proud that we did what we did, against all odds. They used to say we couldn't sing or write a tune and had no excuse to be on stage. But it was the audience who kept us going."

Former Patti Smith Group guitarist Lenny Kaye called Sylvain "the heart and soul of the New York Dolls". Kaye elaborated: "Though he tried valiantly to keep the band going, in the end the Dolls' moral fable overwhelmed them, not before seeding an influence that would engender many rock generations yet to come."

After hearing the news, Slash posted a photo of Sylvain accompanied by the word: "RIP". Steven Van Zandt described him as "a great, great guy. Very talented. Underrated. Always welcoming positive energy. An essential member of the legendary New York Dolls."

When *Rolling Stone* asked for Johansen's feelings about being the lone survivor of the Dolls, the singer replied simply: "That I'm next." **FL/DL**

Jim Weatherly
March 17, 1943 – February 3, 2021

In a run that lasted for 50 years, American singer-songwriter Jim Weatherly composed many familiar pieces of music for the likes of Glenn Campbell, Neil Diamond and Kenny Rogers, though *Midnight Train To Georgia*, recorded in 1973 by Gladys Knight & The Pips, was his bona fide classic. He died of natural causes at his Tennessee home, aged 77.

Per 'Pelle' Alsing
June 6, 1960 - December 19, 2020

Per Gessle of Roxette has paid tribute to the Swedish band's drummer over two eras, describing his work as "amazing and inventive" and calling him "a kind and generous man with the biggest heart". Alsing, who also performed on albums by Billy Bremner, Ulf Lundell and the late Roxette singer Marie Fredriksson, had battled cancer for 17 years. He was 60.

Eric Pacheco
Died December 6, 2020

San Franciscan hard rockers Babylon AD are mourning the loss of their former bassist. Eric Pacheco was 53 years old. Cause of death is yet to be announced. Pacheco's sibling Jamey, the band's drummer, said: "Eric was a wonderful husband, father, son and friend. It was a true honour to have him as my brother."

Jimmie Rodgers
September 18, 1933 – January 18, 2021

Not to be confused with a country music namesake who died in the year of his birth (the pair were not related), Rodgers also had a long career in contemporary country music. His biggest hit was *English Country Garden*, a rewrite of the traditional song *Country Gardens*, in 1962. Rodgers was 87 at the time of his passing.

Chad Stuart
December 10, 1941 - December 20, 2020

Despite being born in Britain, singer-songwriter Chad Stuart was better known in the US where he had hits during the 1960s as part of the duo Chad & Jeremy. The folk-pop pair enjoyed success with songs like *Yesterday's Gone*, *A Summer Song* and *Willow Weep For Me*. Stuart, born David Stuart Chadwick, was 79.

Danny Ray
Died February 2, 2021

Once called "the second-hardest working man in show business", Danny Ray was James Brown's emcee and "cape man" from 1960 until The Godfather Of Soul's death in 2006. His voice can be heard in introductions on numerous live releases. At Brown's funeral, Ray – 85 at the time of his own passing – had draped a sequined cape over his boss's coffin.

Hilton Valentine

May 21, 1943 – January 29, 2021

The creator of one of the most famous opening guitar riffs in popular music has died at the age of 77. Hilton Valentine was a co-founder of the Animals, whose revision of the blues standard *The House Of The Rising Sun* topped the charts on both sides of the Atlantic in 1964. Cause of death was yet to be revealed as we went to press.

Former Animals singer Eric Burdon paid tribute on Instagram, writing: "The opening opus of *Rising Sun* will never sound the same! You didn't just play it, you lived it! Heartbroken by the sudden news of Hilton's passing. We had great times together, Geordie lad. From the North Shields to the entire world… Rock In Peace."

Once heard and never forgotten, the arpeggio intro to …*Rising Sun* became one of the most iconic pieces of music in history, some experts believing that it played a role in causing Bob Dylan to go down the electric path the following year, influencing the sound of rock'n'roll for decades to come.

However, the part concerned almost ended up on the cutting room floor – the band's producer Mickie Most initially considered the song too lengthy for radio play.

According to Valentine, even from within the band there was some initial resistance to the song's the famous Am-C-D-F chord sequence. He told an interviewer: "As we started rehearsing, I came up with my arpeggio bit and Alan Price said: 'Can you play something different because that is so corny?' So I told him: 'You play your damn keyboard and I'll play me guitar!' Then, after a few rehearsals, he started playing my riff and we recorded it."

Down the years there has been much consternation that Price alone is credited with the song's arrangement.

"Our manager, Mike Jeffrey, said that we couldn't put all of our names on the record because it wouldn't fit, so he just used Alan's name," said Valentine in the same interview. "It was understood that the royalties would be shared among everyone. We were all so gullible that we just believed that. With nothing in writing to this day only Pricey gets royalties. Talk to him now and he's actually convinced himself that that he arranged it."

Valentine had taken up the guitar at the age of 13, inspired by Lonnie Donegan and the skiffle craze then sweeping the British Isles. He caught the attention of bassist Chas Chandler, keyboard player Alan Price and Burdon who recruited him to join a new group they were forming in 1963. Adding drummer John Steel they became the Animals. Burdon would credit Valentine with bringing a more hard-edged sound. "It really was Hilton who made the early Animals a rock band because I don't think the element of rock was in the band until we found him," the singer told *Guitar International*.

The band's other hits included *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood*, *We Gotta Get Out Of This Place*, *It's My Life* and *Don't Bring Me Down*.

Three years after their break-up in 1966 Valentine moved to America and released a solo album, *All In Your Head*. He would reunite with the Animals three times, appearing on their 1977 album *Before We Were So Rudely Interrupted*. In recent years Valentine lived in Connecticut and renewed his love affair with skiffle music, forming the band Skiffledog. He also joined Burdon on a solo tour in 2007.

Along with the remaining originals from the Animals – Burdon (who was on tour and didn't attend), Chandler, Price and Steel – Valentine was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 1994. At their induction, Dave Pirner of Soul Asylum described the Animals as a "key link in the evolving transition from black R&B to punk rock".

Bruce Springsteen once called the music of the Animals "a revelation", adding: "They were the first records with full-blown class consciousness that I'd ever heard." **DL**

AVALON/PHOTOSHOT

TOUCH

TOMORROW NEVER COMES

"Tomorrow Never Comes", The third album by TOUCH, continues the saga of this iconic band with anthemic melodies virtuoso musicianship, lush vocals and harmonies and their signature flare for shock and awe.

"Air-keys at the ready, the long-lost TOUCH make a varied and thrilling return".
- Dave Ling PROG Mag

"Stupendous". - Erik Thompson SWEDEN ROCK Mag

"A Great Return". - Howard Johnson ROCK CANDY Mag

"TOUCH in the 21st Century are as good a band as they ever were and they're here to show all those young up-starts just how it's done, an essential album".
- Ian Johnson FIREWORKS Mag

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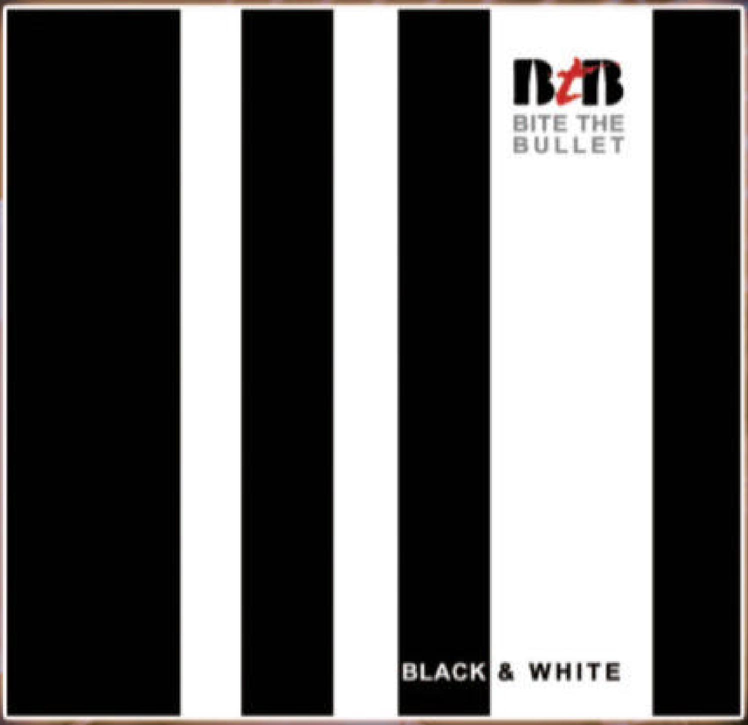
NEW RELEASES



BITE THE BULLET - BLACK & WHITE
ESM349 - Out Now
Limited Edition of 1000 copies, all individually numbered.

Bite The Bullet were originally formed in 1986 by singer songwriter Mick Benton and drummer Graham Cowling who first met as members of West London rock band "Mother's Ruin". Thanks to the legendary Greg Lake, Benton managed to secure a solo deal with Atlantic Records and he asked Cowling to play drums. The music they made was in the style of Foreigner, Toto and Mr. Mister, and an album was released in 1989 to some quiet success. After a 2019 CD release of the debut rekindled interest in the band, Mick and Graham decided to get writing new material for a second "Bite the Bullet" album and the result is outstanding. Coming across like Mr Mister meets Asia the new songs are a natural continuation of the original BTB sound and have a great feel to them, a great start to 2021!.

RADAR - LOST IN THE ATLANTIC
ESM350 - Out 19th February
Limited Edition of 1000 copies, all individually numbered.

Radar was formed in 1981 when David West, Rod Jordan & Gary Stevenson met at the ABC Music Store in Surrey England, where David & Gary both worked. They set up an 8 track-recording studio 'Secret Studios' in West London where they composed their first recordings. In 1983 Radar was signed to Warner Bros UK and their journey began. During this time Gary also produced 'outside' bands at the studio, one of them being an unknown duo called 'Go West'. The resulting recordings caused quite a stir and Go West signed with Chrysalis Records. They stayed with Gary as producer and the rest is history! Radar began recording their own album at 'Trident Studios' in early 1985 and the band was happy to hold back its release and use the success of Gary's production work with other bands to promote it. In retrospect this had a negative effect on Radar, the momentum was lost and the Radar album was never released at the time. Now thanks to Escape Music we finally get to hear this superb album!

ESCAPE MUSIC
Soundfiles for all Escape releases can be found at
www.escape-music.com email:contact@escape-music.com
All titles are also available to download
via iTunes, Napster, Spotify, and Amazon

Manson Accused

Abuse allegations made against the shock rocker.

Marilyn Manson is the subject of multiple allegations of abuse. Horrifying claims from his former fiancée, actor Evan Rachel Wood, that Manson (real name Brian Warner) had "groomed" and "horrifically abused" her "for years" caused a number of other women to add their voices. Ashley Walters, Sarah McNeilly, Gabriella and Ashley Morgan all released statements of their own.

As this issue went to press, *Rolling Stone* was reporting that the shock-rock singer, 52, had been dropped by his long-time manager Tony Ciulla. As the accusations snowballed, Manson was also let go by his record company Loma Vista Recordings, and had two TV acting roles axed.

Manson has refuted the accusations, stating: "My intimate relationships have always been entirely consensual with like-minded partners."

Rumours of Manson's dark behaviour had circulated for years. When *Classic Rock*'s sister title *Metal Hammer* requested comment on the allegations in a late 2020 interview, the singer hung up on their journalist. Read more at metalhammer.com **DL**

Golden Earring, April 2012: (l-r) George Kooymans, Barry Hay, Rinus Gerritsen, Cesar Zuiderwijk.

Golden Earring Forced To Retire

George Kooymans's illness ends band's 60-year career.

Dutch hard rockers Golden Earring are calling it quits after guitarist George Kooymans was diagnosed with the degenerative muscle disease ALS.

Kooymans, a co-founder of the group, told Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad*: "It's a very bad prognosis and I'm not really in the mood to say much about it. I am being treated at the university hospital in Leuven. That's it. It's a progressive disease. Unfortunately, performing is no longer possible."

"This is a death blow," said singer Barry Hay. "We always said we would keep going until one of us fell over. I didn't expect George to be the first. Kooymans was always the toughest of the four of us… We would have preferred a farewell tour, but unfortunately it is what it is."

Best known for their evergreen 1983 hit *Radar Love*, the band released 25 studio albums. Their final show was in 2019 at the 16,000-capacity Ahoy in Rotterdam. The current four-piece line-up had been in place since 1970. **DL**

NEWS

Christine McVie believes that **Fleetwood Mac** might have run their course as a live act. Asked by the BBC whether the band are likely to tour again, the singer and keyboard player replied: "If we do, it will be without John [McVie, bassist] and Stevie [Nicks, vocalist], I think." The 77-year-old added: "I'm getting a bit too old for it now."

Mike Tramp is bidding to enter the Eurovision Song Contest for the second time. The former White Lion and Freak Of Nature frontman represented his native Denmark in 1978 with the song *Boom Boom* as part of the pop band Mabel. "In 2021 I can be one hundred per cent true to myself and not have to put on any mask – I am who I am," he says.

Former Rush guitarist **Alex Lifeson** has a side project with Coney Hatch bassist **Andy Curran**. The pair began putting ideas together more than four years ago but, following the death last year of Rush drummer Neil Peart, had resumed work only recently.

Iron Maiden, **Foo Fighters**, **Kate Bush**, **New York Dolls**, **Devo** and **Rage Against The Machine** are among the 16 nominees for this year's Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame inductions. It's the first time Maiden have made the ballot since becoming eligible in 2005, and singer Bruce Dickinson is not a fan, having previously declared: "The Hall Of Fame is an utter, complete load of bollocks, to be honest."

WELCOME BACK

Black Spiders

Fan of Motörhead, Sabbath and/or AC/DC? Then you might want to get caught up in this band's web (sorry).

From their arrival on the scene in 2008, Sheffield-based band Black Spiders impressed with their high-octane, heavy rock'n'roll, effectively a superlative meld of Motörhead, Sabbath and AC/DC. Three albums and a ton of touring later – including supports with Ozzy Osbourne, Airbourne and Black Stone Cherry – the Spiders ground to a halt as "creatively, we weren't progressing". But a self-titled new album is imminent for Pete 'Spider' Spiby (guitar/lead vocals), Andrew 'Ozzy' Lister (guitar/vocals), Mark 'Dark Shark' Tomas (guitar/vocals), Wyatt Wendels (drums) and Adam 'The Fox' Irwin (bass). Lead Spider Spiby spills the beans.

The band went on hiatus in 2017. What changed to end that?

During the time off we probably had more upheaval than we did up to taking a break [laughs]. I'd done a solo album [*Failed Magician*, 2018], but some songs were more Black Spiders. I talked to Ozzy [Lister] about it, then we all met up at his wedding in 2019 and decided to do something again.

That's a nice celebratory occasion to get you back together.

A wedding, yeah. Myself and Ozzy started swapping ideas, and at the start of 2020 we demoed stuff. Then the pandemic began.

It didn't stop you, though.

No. In fact if we'd known we could work the way we did we might not have had a break. We'd always been a band who went into a rehearsal room with loads of ideas. The new way seemed a lot more straightforward and positive. We ended up with more song ideas than ever.

How did you find your new drummer, Wyatt Wendels [a presenter at Planet Rock radio]?

I was a fan of Wyatt's show, and he did this drum thing during the first lockdown called Cymbals Of Appreciation, recreating song intros, dedicated to key workers. I asked him: "Have you ever been in a band?" We sent him some demos and were impressed with what we got back, so we booked a studio in the time frame between lockdowns.

But you worked remotely.

Yes. We've never been in a room together playing these songs. But things just clicked. We went in to record one at a time, and Wyatt smashed it.

> **"Every song needs to punch you in the face."**

The songs on new album *Black Spiders* are bursting with the joy of rock. What were your inspirations?

We knew if we were coming back we had to dig deep. We cherry-picked songs that would show a breadth of styles, but kept the parameters of the first album [*Sons Of The North*, 2011]. We had a Zoom meeting and Ozzy said: "Every song needs to punch you in the face."

You're now on Patreon (a kind of fan-funding). How will that help support the band?

At the moment we're using this as a fan club, showing works-in-progress and things. We care about the people who already like us, and hopefully at some point we'll all get together for some live shows, which is where we excel.

What else do you see the band doing in 2021?

If this carries on we'll probably just do another album [laughs]. We've got the foundation, we know what we're doing, and the new currency for people is music – and we've got plenty of that. **JK**

Black Spiders is out on March 26 via Dark Riders.

BLACK SPIDERS: MARK LATHAM/PRESS; GOLDEN EARRING: GETTY; BRUCE DICKINSON: JOHN MCMURTRIE/PRESS

"Making this music is as important to me as breathing, drinking or eating."

★ HIGH HOPES

Christopher Shayne

Varied musical strands come together in the search for a harmony-heavy, roller-coaster ride.

"THE BEST SONGS are the ones that take you on a ride," asserts singer/guitarist Christopher Shayne. "I strive for those dynamics. I want those jams, I want the up-and-down. That's what I always think when I'm writing."

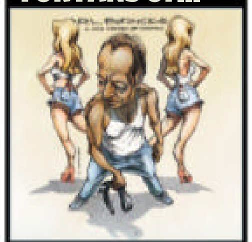
Shayne is a hard southern rocker by nature, but he's equally beholden to old-school blues and outlaw country, ingrained with harmonies to die for. They're all very much in evidence on his latest EP *Ten High*, which captures his questing spirit.

"We wanted to make something that felt raw," Shayne explains from his home in Scottsdale, Arizona. "There's something magical about hearing harmonies sung together in a room. It feels deeply personal. We've been experimenting with what we can get away with, even with some of the heavier, darker stuff. As musicians there has to be a constant drive to push things forward. So it's not just about being real rock'n'roll and having fun, you have to find your niche. That's been a huge thing for me personally."

Ten High is the culmination of a long journey for Shayne. He and lead guitarist Dave Lansing have been writing and playing together for over a decade, starting out in Whiskey Six, a popular draw in Arizona's West Valley. His first album, 2015's *Turning Stones*, was recorded in Detroit with just Lansing and a producer, "but we didn't really know what we were aiming for," he says. "It took us another couple of years of trying different things to get to where we wanted." Bringing in bassist Mark Blades, keyboard player Zachary Hughes and drummer Trevor Hammer (who has since been replaced by Eric Bongiorno) helped realise that vision.

Music is in Shayne's bones. His dad played bass in a local metal band, Surgical Steel, during the 80s, and his mum was a hair-metal devotee. "Her favourite thing is that I went to a Mötley Crüe concert in the womb, so I was already destined to go down that kind of road."

FOR FANS OF...



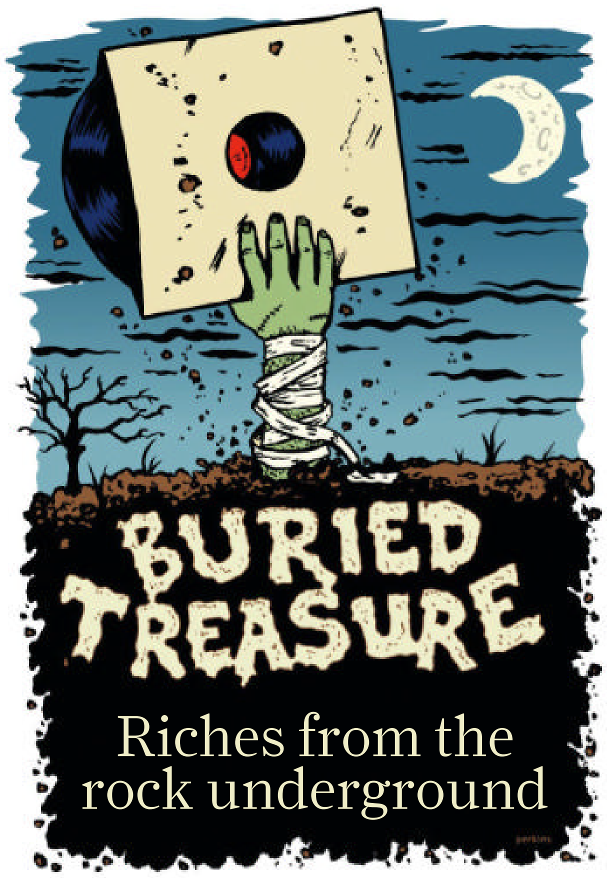
"When I first heard *A Ass Pocket Of Whiskey* I was blown away," recalls Shayne. "It's RL Burnside backed by Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, and it sounds like they just pressed 'Record' and saw what happened. It's blues with a punk-rock vibe. He's seventy, taking the songs he's been playing for fifty years and giving them a twist."

Shayne's first loves were Aerosmith, Megadeth and Metallica. Then he fell for the blues, which cracked his world wide open. "I just started playing guitar in open tunings, like those guys from the thirties and forties," he says. "It's not anything I can readily explain, but it's one of those things where you listen to the way people like Son House or RL Burnside are hitting those notes, the way they're emoting. When you start putting that together with vocal harmonies it brings out this really cool flavour."

Ten High somehow sounds both fresh and familiar. It's possible to discern the blasted grooves of AC/DC, ZZ Top and The Black Crowes, while Shayne and the band also sound like a desert-rock variant of Blackberry Smoke or The Cadillac Three.

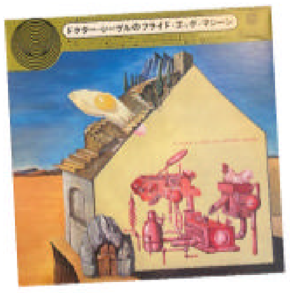
"This is what I signed up for," Shayne concludes. "Making this music is as important to me as breathing, drinking or eating. It just feels *right*." **RH**

Ten High (EP) is out now via Carry On Music.



FLIED EGG

***Dr. Siegel's Fried Egg Shooting Machine*, Vertigo, Japan, 1972. £450+ (with OBI).**



During its iconic 'swirl' label era, Vertigo had a series of domestic Japanese releases that, despite their exotic and collectable appeal, didn't really offer much in terms of creative weirdness or overtly progressive music. Instead, they were generally safe sounding mainstream rock, pop and folk affairs. Among them, Flied Egg (formerly Strawberry Path) are the band that stands out.

Housed in Dali-esque artwork, their surrealistically titled debut suggests something truly out-there. This is somewhat misleading, but what we do have is an excellent psychedelic hard rock album. Its title track could be the theme tune to a surreal late-60s kids' cartoon of the same name. It's quite a feat how they manged to use '*Dr. Siegel's Fried Egg Shooting Machine*' as a chorus, while keeping it catchy and memorable.

Rolling Down The Broadway is killer American-sounding raw hard rock with falsetto backing vocals adding an extra dimension, and there are great guitar/organ solo trade-offs. *Plastic Fantasy* is a beautifully orchestrated two-part dreamy mellow rock track with lots of atmosphere.

'This debut is an excellent psychedelic hard rock album.'

But it's the harder tracks that appeal most. *Burning Fever* is another ripper with great raw guitar tone. *I'm Gonna See My Baby Tonight* is full-swing rocking prog in the tradition of Uriah Heep. Best of all is the brooding eight-minute doomy prog of *Guide Me To The Quietness*.

Flied Egg released one more LP, the ironically titled yet equally excellent *Good Bye* (a mix of live and studio tracks) in the same year as this one. **LD**

NEWS

Mammoth WVH, the group formed by former Van Halen bassist Wolfgang Van Halen and son of the late guitarist Edward, release their self-titled debut album on June 11 via EX1 Records/ Explorer1 Music Group. With WVH on guitar and vocals, the band's line-up is completed by guitarist/ vocalist Jon Jourdan, guitarist Frank Sidoris, bassist/ vocalist Ronnie Ficarro and drummer Garrett Whitlock.

Kiss frontman **Paul Stanley** releases the debut album from his much-touted project Soul Station on March 19 via Universal Music Enterprises. *Now And Then* features nine vintage soul covers and five original songs.

British prog-rockers **Big Big Train** release a newly remixed version of their 2009 album *The Underfall Yard* in March, available on two CDs or three vinyl LPs. Its title track adds a new guitar solo from former It Bites man Francis Dunnery.

Cheap Trick release their 20th studio album, In Another World, on April 9 via BMG. The band have rescheduled their UK tour for February 2022 (see page 101).

As this issue went to press **Jon Schaffer**, the frontman/guitarist of American metal band Iced Earth, had spent three weeks in jail as legal process continued for his alleged part in the January 6 insurrection at the US Capitol. The 52-year-old faces six charges, including spraying a police officer with a pepper-based bear repellent.

STEPHEN JENSEN/PRESS

WELCOME BACK

Damon Johnson

The former Black Stone Riders guitarist has finally found his niche. And it includes licking lots of stamps.

In late 2018, Damon Johnson ended a six-year spell with Black Star Riders, the group the Nashville-based guitarist had co-founded from the ashes of Thin Lizzy. Previously the leader of Brother Cane, Johnson has also played with Alice Cooper and John Waite. His latest vehicle the Get Ready is a power trio completed by Jarred Pope, a drummer who has played with Cinderella's Tom Keifer, and ex-Steve Vai bassist Robbie Harrington.

Having played such a big part in the writing of the first three Black Star Riders albums, what made you leave?
The short answer is that once again I was ready to tell my stories and to take my place behind the microphone. It was a great ride with BSR, but along the way I had got the bug to do my own thing again.

"I've struggled not for success but for artistic fulfilment."

What did you take away from the experience of working with long-term survivors like Scott Gorham and Alice Cooper?
The confidence they both gave to me served as rocket fuel. Sharing the stage with a legend like Alice, and then getting to write songs with him, was like a lightning bolt. Scott Gorham was on my Mount Rushmore of guitarists to be in a band with, and to have done that was completely mind-blowing.

Apart from one ballad, the Get Ready album *Battle Lessons* is an up-tempo, very hummable hard rock album – just what we need in these grim times.
I agree with you. I'm hoping that this record could bring a lot of joy and celebration. When I played the demos to my friend and producer Nick Raskulinecz [Foo Fighters, Rush and Black Star Riders] I was thrilled by his excitement.

Presumably it was made in lockdown?
It was done in batches of three songs, the first of which was ready pre-covid. The fact that Nick was due to make a record with Evanescence was another challenge, but we got around that. To me the album still sounds like one continual body of work.

What is the song *Can't Clap Any Louder* about?
It's a humorous take on some of my far more famous friends and their social-media postings. I refuse to name names, but I always get a chuckle of seeing their photos with the latest expensive car. One of my buddies from a very famous band posts these collections of Nike shoes – enough to fill a department store. The song is about me applauding from the sidelines.

Which of the tracks on the album are you most proud of?
I wrote *Shadow Country* after reading a truly incredible book of the same name. It really spoke to me, man. I have been in *so many* bands, and I've struggled not for success but for artistic fulfilment. That's something I have finally found.

With touring on hold, what happens next for you? Do you plunge straight into another album?
Honestly, as an independent artist there is no other path to take. But the way I feel right now…

Being a cottage industry is fine, as long as it's a happy one?
I couldn't have put it any better. My wife and I are going to lick a lot of stamps over the coming months, but that's great. **DL**

Battle Lessons is available now via Double Dragon Records.

TRANSATLANTIC
THE ABSOLUTE UNIVERSE
TRANSATLANTIC
THE ABSOLUTE UNIVERSE
THE BREATH OF LIFE
[ABRIDGED VERSION]
TRANSATLANTIC
THE ABSOLUTE UNIVERSE
FOREVERMORE
[EXTENDED VERSION]
TRANSATLANTIC
THE ABSOLUTE UNIVERSE
THE ULTIMATE EDITION
In Stores Now
The 5th studio album from the progressive rock super-group featuring Neal Morse, Mike Portnoy, Roine Stolt & Pete Trewavas, available as 2 different editions subtitled 'The Breath Of Life' & 'Forevermore'. Each one provides a different way to experience the music.
'The Absolute Universe: 5.1 Mix (The Ultimate Version)' is released as a standalone blu-ray on the 26th March, featuring the 5.1 mix with visuals and a making of documentary.
Liquid Tension
EXPERIMENT
3
In Stores 26th March 2021
The first new album in 20 years from the supergroup featuring John Petrucci, Mike Portnoy, Jordan Rudess & Tony Levin.
Get yours as a Limited Deluxe 3LP + 2CD + Blu-ray Boxset, as well as Ltd. 2CD Digipak, Ltd. 2CD + Blu-ray Artbook, Gatefold 2LP + CD & Digital Album.
SONY MUSIC
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INSIDE OUT MUSIC

MY FIRST LOVE

The Beatles

INTRODUCING... THE BEATLES

By Clem Burke

Blondie's drummer on the Fab Four's first album.

People of my generation in the States all cite The Beatles' first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* as a lightbulb moment. Everyone mentions it. I've since come to realise that for you guys in the UK The Beatles were more like boys next door, not particularly unusual. But for people in the States, the way they used English colloquialisms in their songs seemed so exotic. When the film *A Hard Day's Night* came out you actually heard them speak, their personalities came to the fore, another major insight for people in America.

Introducing... The Beatles was the first UK album *Please Please Me*, minus a couple of tracks . Back in the day, I'd have bought the mono version because the stereo was a dollar more. But we've all since come to know that The Beatles were only present for the mono mixes, the stereo stuff was done later.

It kicks off with *I Saw Her Standing There* and ends with *Twist And Shout*. It's mostly covers of stuff by Arthur Alexander, Buddy Holly and girl-group songs like *Boys, Chains* and *Baby, It's You*. I always thought it a bit weird having Ringo singing *Boys*. Even to this day it seems odd. It was very unusual then for any guy groups to do girl-group stuff. *A Taste Of Honey* would make me cringe, but the whole album's so eclectic. And that eclecticism was a role model for everything we did with Blondie. **IF**

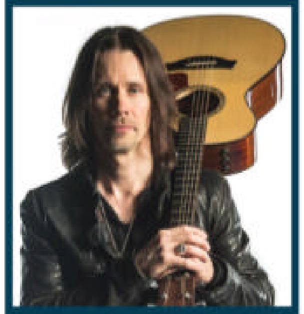
NEWS

Keith Richards has fuelled speculation over fresh activity from the Rolling Stones. The guitarist shared a photograph of himself in the studio with the words: "New music on the horizon".

Alice Cooper and his wife Sheryl have received the covid-19 vaccine after the singer, 73, contracted and recovered from the virus.

Bruce Springsteen, who made headlines for his first corporate tie-in, an advert for Jeep that premiered during the Super Bowl, has had the campaign placed on ice after news broke that he was arrested for drunk-driving last year. Springsteen was charged with DWI, reckless driving, and consuming alcohol in a closed area on November 14.

A new super-deluxe edition of **Fleetwood Mac**'s 1980 album *Fleetwood Mac Live* is released on April 9 via Rhino Records. Among the bonus features are an hour's worth of previously unreleased live music recorded between 1977 and 1982.



Alter Bridge/Slash frontman **Myles Kennedy** (pictured) releases his second solo album on May 14 via Napalm Records.

Having been ousted from Slade by guitarist Dave Hill last year, drummer **Don Powell** has formed his own group, the Don Powell Band. The line-up is completed by frontman Curly, guitarist and vocalist Bob Wilson, guitarist Jon Briscoe and bassist Craig Fenney.

LUCERO: BOB BAYNE/PRESS

WELCOME BACK

Lucero

Ben Nichols on whisky, redemption, fatherhood and recording in the shadow of Elvis.

As bastard sons and square pegs in the Memphis scene since the late-1990s, nobody has yet found an adequate descriptor for Lucero. And *When You Found Me*, their tenth album, won't change that, frontman Ben Nichols says, smiling. Bolstering the band's Americana-noir with sweeping synth and lyrics about the wrench of leaving his young family, it's another left-turn in Nichols's widescreen vision. "But I'm still writing the same kind of songs," he reassures us. "There's still yearning and heartbreak and melancholy."

You recorded in the thick of covid. How did that work?

We were all in masks on the cutting room floor, any time I wasn't singing. But we made it through the two weeks with no infections. We recorded at Sam Phillips Recording Service, a couple of blocks over from Sun Studio in Memphis. Sam Phillips built it from the ground up, and everything was designed with his mad-scientist ideas in mind. It has these cave-like reverb chambers. Johnny Cash and Elvis hung out in the bar upstairs and you can still see their cigarette burns. You can't help but soak up some of that energy.

> "I think we're a classic rock-influenced Americana band."

If people ask what Lucero sound like, what do you tell them?

I think we're a classic rock-influenced Americana band. Obviously we've used some new sounds on this record, with synthesisers being the main thing. I was born in 1974, so the eighties were my education, and I've gone back and fallen in love with the songs I heard on the radio; *Urgent* by Foreigner might not be as cool to reference as Tom Petty, but it's all in there, the good and the bad. Y'know, Huey Lewis And The News versus the Eagles versus Warren Zevon. It was all in the back of my mind.

If this album was a movie soundtrack, what kind of movie would it be?

We've actually done a lot of soundtrack work for my little brother's films. He's named Jeff Nichols and he's a very talented writer-director. If this music was a film, it'd be set in our home state of Arkansas and it'd be a Southern Gothic tale that might take place just off the interstate in a seedy dive bar. The song that epitomises the record is *Outrun The Moon*. That started off as a murder ballad. I had this story about a young girl who I imagined on the backroads of rural Arkansas, getting into trouble and going on the run.

You recently became a father and say your family "saved you". From what?

That's the subject of the title track. I'd put off growing up for a long time. I'd carved out this niche in life where I didn't have to be responsible for anyone, including myself. I was in a van with a rock band, travelling the United States and the world, having a blast, living it up. But everyone's seen *Behind The Music* on VH1, and everybody knows the pitfalls of the rock'n'roll lifestyle.

How far did you take that lifestyle?

Unhealthy enough. I'm a whisky kind of a guy. That might not be the most glamorous rock-star vice these days, but it's good enough to kill ya if you're not careful. It was definitely a healthy change when I met my wife. Then we had a daughter. And I had a reason to make it out alive and to come back home. Now, instead of writing about a random girl at the bar or a relationship that's failed, the heartbreak is me wanting to get back to my family. **HY**

When You Found Me is out now via Thirty Tigers.

★ HIGH HOPES

Wheel

"We want to mess with music and turn it on its head to see what happens."

With songs revolving around human existence, their music is nothing if not ambitious.

It's not often that TV talent shows find prog-metal stars of the future, but in a roundabout way that's what happened with Helsinki-based Wheel.

British frontman James Lascelles had been a student in Scarborough, drumming and singing in jazz-folk and classic rock bands but working on his own music in his downtime. Broke and about to give up, he was offered a fresh start when a friend moved to Finland and won the country's *Pop Idol* competition, and invited him over to play guitar and sing with him.

"I fell in love with the country," says Lascelles. "I've been here for ten years now and I can't imagine moving back."

He was working on a different, karaoke-based television game show when the seed of Wheel was sown over a particularly energetic version of Robbie Williams's *Let Me Entertain You*, when he locked eyes with the house band's guitarist mid-solo. The pair soon put a group together. While the original line-up is long gone, the current version of Wheel – completed by bassist Aki Virta, drummer Santeri Saksala and new guitarist Jussi Turunen – are about to release *Resident Human*, their high-concept, spectacularly inventive second album.

Sharing a sonic complexity with peers such as Tool, the album was written in the shadow of lockdown. Burned out and depressed, Lascelles took themes that he'd learned in therapy, along with his own philosophical outlook on the world, to craft a record that delves deep into the meaning of human existence.

"It was looking like a really great year," he says. "And then within twenty-four hours everything was cancelled. The initial reaction was: okay, we'll just focus on making the best album we can. There's only one song on the album that is directly about the pandemic, *Fugue*, which is about this sense of being in stasis, and all of us putting everything on hold waiting for the sun to come back up. Most of the record is about figuring out what it means to be human, and what we do with this life when we take a step back from the social norms."

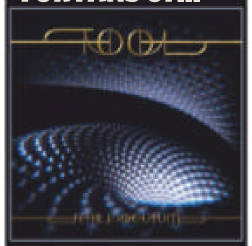
Wheel have also taken inspiration from *Hyperion Cantos*, a series of novels by sci-fi author Dan Simmons, which forced the frontman to confront the notion that life is meaningless without death.

If human existence sounds like a weighty theme to tackle, it's matched by the intricacy of the music, the songs given the space to stretch out and find their way. The whole thing screams of ambition, of a fight against mediocrity.

"The thing that ties all the best art together is sincerity," Lascelles says. "There's a real lack of innovation in contemporary music. We just kind of want to mess with music and turn it on its head to see what happens." **EJ**

Resident Human is out March 26 via Odyssey Music.

FOR FANS OF...



"Tool are a band we always get compared to. I think the biggest comparison is the production style. For this album, with the subject matter being all about humanity, we wanted it to have a roughness to it that we've deliberately left in. It just feels more human. And that's something you get from *Fear Inoculum*."

VILLE JUURIKKALA/PRESS

THE STORIES BEHIND THE SONGS

Metallica
Enter Sandman

With a little help from astrophysics, Ice-T and Heart, the band came up with what became not only Metallica's best-known song but also one of heavy metal's classic tracks.

Words: **Paul Elliott**

It's Metallica's most famous song, and one of metal's greatest anthems. And as the band's drummer and co-founding member Lars Ulrich recalls, what he experienced in the creation of *Enter Sandman* was something akin to divine inspiration. "The planets were aligning," he says. "It's like you're guided by some sort of cosmic energy, it steers you."

In 1991, *Enter Sandman* was, in every respect, a game changer for Metallica. For the band that had defined thrash metal in the 80s, this track had a different kind of heaviness, a measured power and epic feel comparable to AC/DC's *Hells Bells*. And with this artistic breakthrough came commercial success on a massive scale.

Enter Sandman was the hit single that set the band's fifth album – officially titled *Metallica* but commonly known as the Black Album – on the path to selling more than 30 million copies worldwide. It was this track, more than any other, that elevated Metallica from cult heroes to the world's biggest metal band.

"I'm the worst one at being analytical and intellectualising Metallica songs," Ulrich says. "But if I have to put that hat on, I guess it was just the right song at the right time."

As Ulrich sees it, necessity was the mother of invention. Metallica's last album of the 80s, *...And Justice For All*, was their most complex, and in places, overwrought. "I look at it very practically," Ulrich says. "With the first four Metallica albums, it was a journey that sort of got more and more progressive, more and more crazy and kooky and long-winded. It got sort of nuttier and nuttier along the way. So when we were done with the *Justice* cycle we were like: okay, there's got to be a reset here, because we can't just keep going longer and crazier and more progressive. It's sort of like we hit a wall. So when we got together to write the next batch of songs, the mission statement was: simplify. And the first song we wrote, on day one, was *Enter Sandman*."

The song was written by Ulrich, guitarist/vocalist James Hetfield and lead guitarist Kirk Hammett. The main riff was composed by Hammett alone in the small hours of an overnight session, its dark tone and heavy mood inspired in part by Soundgarden's 1988 album *Louder Than Love*. In stark contrast to the convoluted material on *...And Justice For All*, *Enter Sandman* was, as Ulrich described it, "a one-riff song".

"It's so hard to just write short and sweet," he says. "But we nailed that one on the head because at that time it was completely instinctive. There was just something about that moment, and you can never recreate that sense of having the slate completely clean or that sense of one hundred per cent instinct or just being completely devoid of thought or any sort of contrived idea of what you're creating."

For his solo, Hammett turned again to Seattle rock, albeit via a secondary source – a sample of the lead break from Heart's 1975 classic *Magic Man* on rapper Ice-T's album *Power*. "I heard that," Hammett said, "and thought: 'I have to snake this!'"

But while so much of *Enter Sandman* came easily, the lyrics were more problematic. The first song written for the Black Album was the last to be finished.

Hetfield's first-draft lyrics addressed the subject of cot death. As he later outlined it bluntly: "Baby suddenly dies, the sandman killed it." When Ulrich and producer Bob Rock suggested a rewrite, Hetfield was incensed. But in time he cooled off, and came back with new lyrics in which his visions of childhood nightmares matched the sinister feel in the music. Notably, in place of a rather clunky line *'Disrupt the perfect family'*, he delivered the signature hook: *'Off to never never land.'*

As Ulrich says of the power in *Enter Sandman*: "It was a whole slew of things that came together. That riff is obviously super-memorable. When those toms come in the whole building starts shaking. And then there's that sense of wonder in the lyrics."

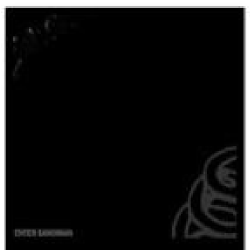
Many diehard Metallica fans, the thrash metal freaks, had cried "sell-out" when Bob Rock had been enlisted as producer for the Black Album, a guy known for his work with hair-metal poseurs such as Bon Jovi and Mötley Crüe. But it was Ulrich who had pushed for Rock, impressed by the huge and heavy sound of the Crüe's *Dr. Feelgood*. As he says now, his faith in Rock was more than vindicated by the building-shaking sonic boom of *Enter Sandman*.

"The simpler the song is, the simpler it is to make it sound good," he says. "*Highway To Hell* is probably the simplest AC/DC song, and it's also the one that sounds the best. Because the simpler it is, the less that's there, the more the sonics can speak. When you can simplify what it is you want to say – whether it's *Jumpin' Jack Flash* or *Rock And Roll* or *Smoke On The Water* – it's easier for more people to connect to."

"It's so hard to just write short and sweet. But we nailed that one on the head because at that time it was completely instinctive."

It was also Ulrich who pushed for *Enter Sandman* to be the album's opening track and flagship single, when others in the Metallica camp were favouring *Holier Than Thou*, a high-speed blast of thrash metal firmly rooted in the band's past. Ulrich won that argument, and again he was vindicated. In 1991, a year of revolution in rock music, spearheaded by a trio of multi-platinum albums by Seattle grunge bands – Nirvana's *Nevermind*, Pearl Jam's *Ten* and Soundgarden's *Badmotorfinger* – with *Enter Sandman* Metallica had a new sound for a new era.

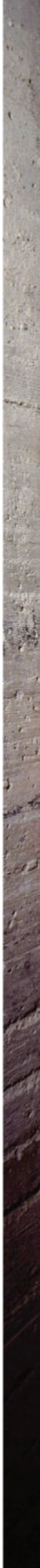
Ulrich concludes: "If *Enter Sandman* had come out five years earlier or five years later it may have been a different thing. The one thing I always make sure to say is you can never take the moment out of it. *Enter Sandman* was a moment, and that moment happened to resonate with a lot of people."



STAYING POWER

"For some reason, *Enter Sandman* has really stuck around," says Lars Ulrich. Metallica have played the song in nearly every show since 1991, and it served as the grand finale on the band's WorldWired tour that ran from 2016 to 2020. It is also the highest-ranking Metallica song on Spotify, with more than six million plays, while the official video has registered close to half a billion views on YouTube.

The track also gained unwanted notoriety when it was revealed that the US military had used it during the 2003 invasion of Iraq – submitting prisoners to loud playbacks. As Ulrich stated to US TV news channel MSNBC: "If there are people that are dumb enough to use Metallica to interrogate prisoners, you're forgetting about all the music that's to the left of us; I can name, you know, thirty Norwegian death-metal bands that would make Metallica sound like Simon And Garfunkel."



ROSS HALFIN

Metallica: winning a new audience by keeping things simple.

THE FACTS

RELEASE DATE
July 29, 1991

HIGHEST CHART POSITION
UK No.5,
US No.16

PERSONNEL
James Hetfield
Guitar, vocals
Lars Ulrich
Drums
Kirk Hammett
Guitar
Jason Newsted
Bass

WRITTEN BY
Kirk Hammett,
James Hetfield,
Lars Ulrich

PRODUCED BY
Bob Rock,
James Hetfield,
Lars Ulrich

LABEL
Vertigo

Q&A

Benji Webbe

The Skindred frontman on loving vinyl, coping with lockdown, the Pope's bling, and not wearing a feather boa to go to Asda.

Words: **Hannah May Kilroy** Portrait: **Paul Harries**

Last year may have scuppered Skindred's touring plans, but it didn't demolish their frontman Benji Webbe's spirit. While so many creatives and artists struggled during lockdown, not least from the financial and psychological aspects of not being able to do whatever it is they normally do, the metal/reggae-mashing innovator worked on new music – writing Skindred songs and also recording a whole album of classic rock covers – and wrote a children's book about a cool cat named Colin.

As for Skindred, they're re-releasing their 2007 second album *Roots Rock Riot* on vinyl for the very first time, which Benji hopes will introduce a new wave of fans to his music.

What prompted you decide to revisit *Roots Rock Riot* now?
Vinyl is more my buzz. People never had the album on vinyl, and I feel like there are so many kids now discovering vinyl for the first time. CDs are cool and all, but I remember as a kid I'd spend hours looking at vinyl albums. There's just something special about them. A lot of record stores closed when CDs came out, and now they're getting a second life.

Did revisiting the album bring back a lot of memories of that time?
So many. That was the first album that we toured America extensively with. We toured coast to coast in a van. That's something that will either split the band or bring it together. Fortunately it brought us together. We played a place called Green Bay [in Wisconsin], where Buddy Holly had played before he died. We also had our gear stolen on that tour, taken out of the van. After that, some of us just wanted to go home, but we decided to drive to the next place, borrow some gear and go on. If we'd gone home, that might have been the end of the band. I'm a firm believer that problems have solutions.

Do you have any favourite songs on *Roots Rock Riot*?
There's a song called *Trouble*, which was based on a situation I had in a kebab shop. I was with a friend of mine, and these guys came in and just started fighting him. I wouldn't call myself a fighter, but I couldn't help it, I jumped in the middle. So that song reminds me of defending your friends. I don't think the guys even knew I was with my friend, cos I dressed more out-there and he was dressed like a normal human being – instead of having a feather boa on!

You're known for your outfits. Do you have a style icon?
I've got three people who've influenced me, who all stood out wherever they'd go: Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson and the Pope. I remember seeing the Pope on TV when I was a kid and thinking this guy has got the cross and the bling! The three of them, when they walk into a room you know they're there. That's what I adhere to. If I'm going down to Asda I might not wear a feather boa and pink slippers, but if I'm going somewhere rock'n'roll I wanna stand out.

You were interviewed on ITV last October for Black History Month. How was that for you?
I was honoured to go there and speak about my band, and I was driven by the fact I could talk about the unity my band brings. Not just about being a black guy, but also how we bring different people together from different nations, playing this rock music with reggae. I know that as a black man I'm privileged because of what I do, because of the music I make. A friend of mine could go to the same places I've been and not be treated the same. I've played some festivals where I was the only black man there, which was strange. I always had the attitude that if I walk on stage and act like: "Oh, poor me", then that's what will be. So I walk on stage and command, bring a positive energy. There's a lot of people out there giving something to frown at; I wanna give something to smile at.

You're living in Newport, Wales, which is where you're from. What keeps you there?
I spent some time living in Florida, which was good because it made me realise how much I love my home town. If I could drag Newport over to Florida for the weather, I think I would. Not for the hurricanes, mind.

Newport's got a big music scene. In the seventies you had these punk rockers and these Rastas and they all hung out together, and I think that really rubbed off on me growing up. Joe Strummer from The Clash learned to play guitar in this town, which is an inspiring story for me. The whole reggae thing with The Clash was inspired by a little club in Newport where Joe hung out, called the Silver Sands. He wanted to take the punkness of London and mix it with reggae, and it's beautiful that it was born in Newport.

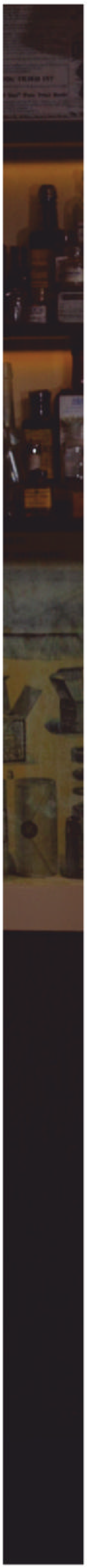
How have you coped with lockdown?
We've been writing a lot of Skindred songs. We've written about thirty, so we're just waiting for this thing to calm down so we can go into the studio and record our eighth album. I also did a covers album, classic rock songs into rocksteady ska – *Bohemian Rhapsody, Life On Mars, Ace Of Spades*. It's called *Isolation Project 2020*. And I wrote a children's book, *The Wonderful Adventures Of Colin The Coolest Kitten*. I'd always wanted to do something like that, but never had the time. 2020 gave me time to really think about stuff. It's been a blessing and a curse."

It sounds like you've dealt with it very well.
At first what was killing me the most was having, like, two hundred shows booked for last year, and on the dates we were supposed to play I was at home. It broke my heart, really. I felt down, but being creative lifted me up. So on the days we were meant to be playing, I went and wrote some music.

I try to remain productive, and to rise above. Weirdly, I'm enjoying my own company now, and before I wasn't. I felt like I had to be the showman all the time, but now I'm realising that while the showman's cool, I like me too.

The reissue of Roots Rock Riot is released on April 23 via Hassle Hindsight.

"There's a lot of people out there giving something to frown at; I wanna give something to smile at."



6 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

Skam

The Leicester power trio on their love of rock and performing live, adventures with The Answer, and playing a pub gig for a witch.

Words: **Polly Glass**

Steve Hill is an upbeat guy. Since the world turned upside down last year he's thrown himself into livestreaming with Skam (the band he co-founded in 2011), alongside parenting responsibilities and his day job as a teacher. Still, at this point even he is starting to get a bit bored. "It's been alright," the Skam singer/guitarist tells us, Cheshire Cat grin intact. "I mean… it's pretty shit, in't it? But we're doing okay, keeping ourselves busy."

Together with bassist/co-founder Matt Gilmore and drummer Neal Hill, he has also been able to finalise their new EP, *Intra*. A strapping six-tracker, it's a refreshing follow-up to 2017's conceptual colossus *The Amazing Memoirs Of Geoffrey Goddard*. With one foot in the heavier end of the Foo Fighters and another in the classic arsenals of Iron Maiden, Thunder and AC/DC, it's Skam's biggest and best set of songs yet, stirred together with ruminations on human struggles.

At gigs you'll find them out front with fans.
Rock fans first and foremost – and raised on a cocktail of classic rock and their local late-90s/early-00s scene – Skam would rather be partying with fans than holding court in green rooms.

"We didn't wanna go to a gig and sit and drink lemon and honey before the show," Gilmore says of their earlier shows, "it was about meeting people, talking to people, drinking a vast amount of beer, Steve smoking too many fags…"

"We're very social animals that way," Hill adds. "We still like to come out and see everybody."

It all began in the rock haunts of Leicester.
Before Skam, the singer and bassist started out in ill-fated punk group The A.I.Ds. Music-loving misfits in school ("Matt was a full-on skinhead," Hill says, "I wore black nail varnish"), they spent weekends at gigs and frequenting local rock club Alcatraz. Starting the band, which eventually morphed into Skam, was a no-brainer.

"We were awful," Gilmore says with a grimace, "but at that point we weren't thinking about much, it was just pure fun."

Skam got their first breaks doing gigs with tribute bands.
Early momentum developed through support slots with bands playing familiar songs. Packed rooms across the country, geared up for a night of well-executed classics, proved an ideal place to cut their teeth and find lasting fans.

"Limehouse Lizzy, Dressed To Kill, ZZ Stop, there was a Bad Company one, a Whitesnake one…" Gilmore recalls.

"It was one of the best things we did," Hill says. "Instead of playing down Leicester under our own name, finding the same fifteen people were coming out, we were travelling out of town, playing Nottingham, London… It was cool."

They performed for a witch in Alsager.
Skam's earlier gigs took them to some unusual places, one of which was a pub that had an interesting landlady, locally dubbed 'the Witch Of Alsager'. "She was just a rocker, really," Matt says, laughing.

"We were sleeping in the pub, upstairs, after this show, and…" Hill chuckles. "This'll sound terrible, but she looked like a witch – she wore this big black robe. We were smoking and she was cooking herbs [laughs]. I don't mean we were doing hard-core drugs, but she got a pestle and mortar out, she was making a spell, then we were smoking catnip and all this kind of shit!"

They joined The Answer at a greasy spoon built *under* a stage.
"When we supported The Answer and The Union at Rock City in Nottingham, it was like a dream come true. That was our childhood venue of choice," Hill reflects. "But *literally* built underneath the main stage was a greasy spoon cafe, for the bands! You'd go through the door, under the stage, and there'd be some tables set out with doilies on them. And there was a bloke smoking through a vent, going: 'Alright, lads, you want a Sunday roast?' You could hear the other band upstairs and the lights would shake."

The songs are important, but Skam live for playing live.
"Things like doing interviews, releasing records, it's all the conduit towards being able to play live," Gilmore says. "So not being able to do it has been really strange."

"We were moaning about *only* being able to pull a hundred people to a show," Hill says. "Or we'd travel up to the north of Scotland and thirty people had come, and we'd be like: 'This is shit.' But actually I would give my left bollock to play a gig in front of thirty people now."

Intra (EP) is available now via Golden Robot Records.

"We can rebuild him!" (l-r) Neal Hill, Steve Hill, Matt Gilmore.

SHONA CUTT/PRESS

SET THE CONTROLS FOR THE MOON

After Syd Barrett left, **Pink Floyd** were on a constant search for a sound – *their* sound. Eventually, Waters, Gilmour, Wright and Mason would find it. But it took a while, with some strange gigs, a couple of bonkers soundtracks, studio experimentation and a spot of conflict along the way...

Words: **Mark Blake**

HEILEMANN / CAMERA PRESS

Gilmour, Mason, Waters and Wright circa 1971.

In Pink Floyd's long and illustrious history, Cyril Van Den Hemel's name is a footnote at best. Yet in 1968 he had the rare distinction of booking Britain's premier art-rock band to play matinee gigs in Dutch primary schools. "To eight-year-olds, sitting cross-legged on the floor, wondering what the hell was going on," remembered Floyd's former bass player Roger Waters.

Van Den Hemel ran the Europop Agency, who booked the cream of underground bands, such as Floyd, Deep Purple and Jethro Tull, to play Amsterdam's hippie nightspots The Paradiso and Fantasio.

In early summer 1968, Van Den Hemel booked Pink Floyd for a tour of the Netherlands and Belgium. Their hit single *See Emily Play* and whimsical debut LP *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn* had accompanied the previous year's so-called Summer Of Love. But by the end of 1967 Floyd's talismanic frontman Syd Barrett was on his way out.

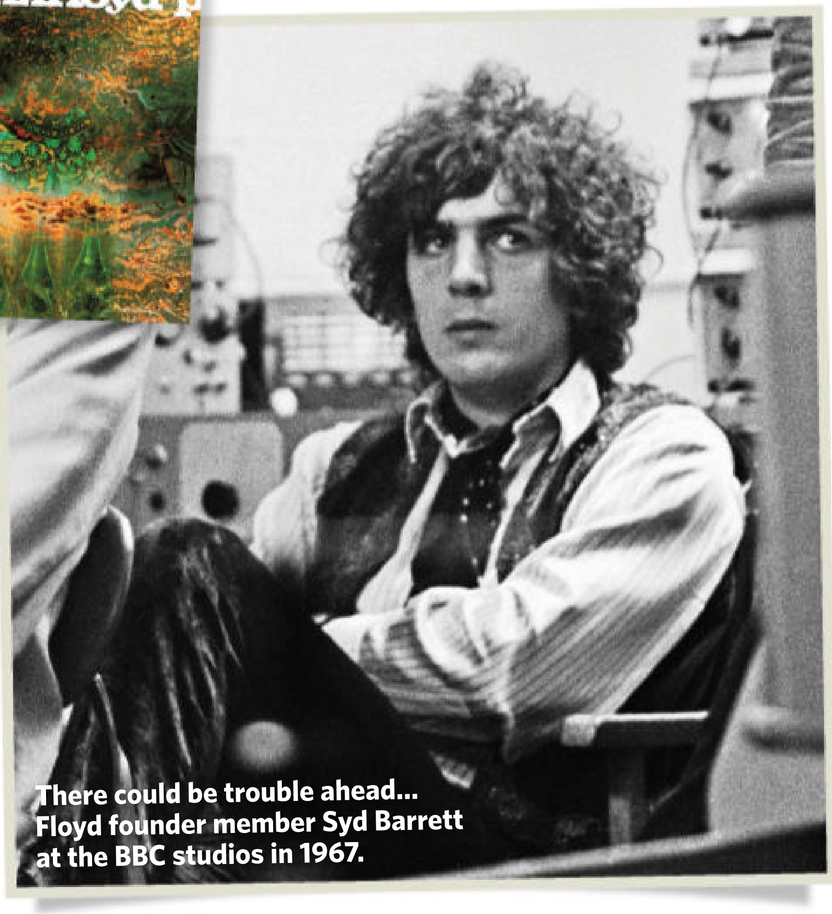
Waters, keyboard player Rick Wright and drummer Nick Mason replaced Barrett with guitarist David Gilmour. But their future looked uncertain. Pink Floyd began 1968 grateful for any work, which is how Van Den Hemel persuaded them to play in schools.

These clandestine performances took place in the afternoon before a regular show, and without the knowledge of the band's management. "Cyril would say: 'You only need to bring the drum kit and one amp,'" said Waters. "He'd then wheel us into the school auditorium." Nobody involved can remember what Floyd played, only the baffled expressions on the faces of their junior audience.

These gigs lasted as long as it took Van Den Hemel to extract their fee in guilders, and rarely more than 15 minutes: "He'd say: 'We got the money! We go now!'" This was the band's cue to throw their instruments in the van and high-tail it away like bank robbers fleeing a heist. A few hours later they'd be on-stage somewhere like the Concertgebouw in the Dutch harbour town of Vlissengen, blowing stoned young minds with songs like *Astronomy Domine* and *Interstellar Overdrive*. Business as usual.

"After Syd left, a lot of people thought we were over."

Nick Mason



There could be trouble ahead... Floyd founder member Syd Barrett at the BBC studios in 1967.

In 1973, Pink Floyd's eighth studio album *The Dark Side Of The Moon* made them one of the biggest bands in the world. But back when they wheel-spun their van out of school carparks in Holland, global stardom seemed unlikely. Pink Floyd were still working out what sort of group they were going to be. This journey of self-discovery would involve film soundtracks, performance art happenings, a man dressed as a monster urinating on the audience, a woman named Constance Ladell with a radioactive pacemaker….

The new Pink Floyd began when David Gilmour first plugged in his Strat in their rehearsal room and played like Jimi Hendrix. Gilmour had grown up in Cambridge with Waters and Barrett, but didn't mimic Barrett's abstract guitar style. He'd become a semi-pro musician at 15 – and it showed.

"It was a relief having him in the band," said Mason. "Though at first we had this idea we'd be a five-piece – David would do the heavy lifting and Syd would stay at home and write songs."

But this proved impractical when Barrett failed to deliver any songs. His

MAIN: AVALON; INSET: GETTY

Floyd at New York club Steve Paul's The Scene, 1968.

behaviour had become increasingly erratic, due to undiagnosed mental health issues and his use of hallucinogenic drugs. For a time, the two guitarists shared stages together. But it was problematic.

One roadie recalled a gig where a disorientated Barrett stood so close to Gilmour that he was an inch from his face: "Syd then started walking around, almost checking if he was a three-dimensional object."

Gilmour insists he can't remember which band member suggested not picking up Barrett for a gig at Southampton University in January 1968. But that snap decision made in the back of a car would have a profound impact on their lives.

On April 6 it was officially announced Syd Barrett had left Pink Floyd. The following week the band released a new single, *It Would Be So Nice*, a Kinks-ish pop ditty, with keyboard player Rick Wright singing lead vocals. It tanked. "Complete trash," Waters said later.

The band returned to Abbey Road studios to lick their wounds and complete their second album. They'd started it with Barrett, but it was Waters who drove *A Saucerful Of Secrets* over the finishing line. He was the least experienced musician (and Wright never tired of telling interviewers how he had to tune Roger's bass), but Waters had previously worked in an architect's office, and was scared of going back. "I just hated being under the boot so much," he said in 1970. "And I can always build a house for myself one day if I want to."

Waters took the bit between his teeth and almost willed himself to become a songwriter. But both he and Floyd's other principal writer, Rick Wright, had to find a new direction. "We could never write like Syd," cautioned Wright. "We never had the imagination to come up with some of the lyrics he did."

> **"We had this idea we'd be a five-piece – David would do the heavy lifting and Syd would stay at home and write songs."**
>
> **Nick Mason on David Gilmour joining Floyd**

The tracks that defined *A Saucerful Of Secrets* were the ones that sounded the least like the old Pink Floyd: *Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun* and the title track were mini-symphonies with prolonged instrumental passages; a dummy run, of sorts, for what would come later with *Echoes* and *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*.

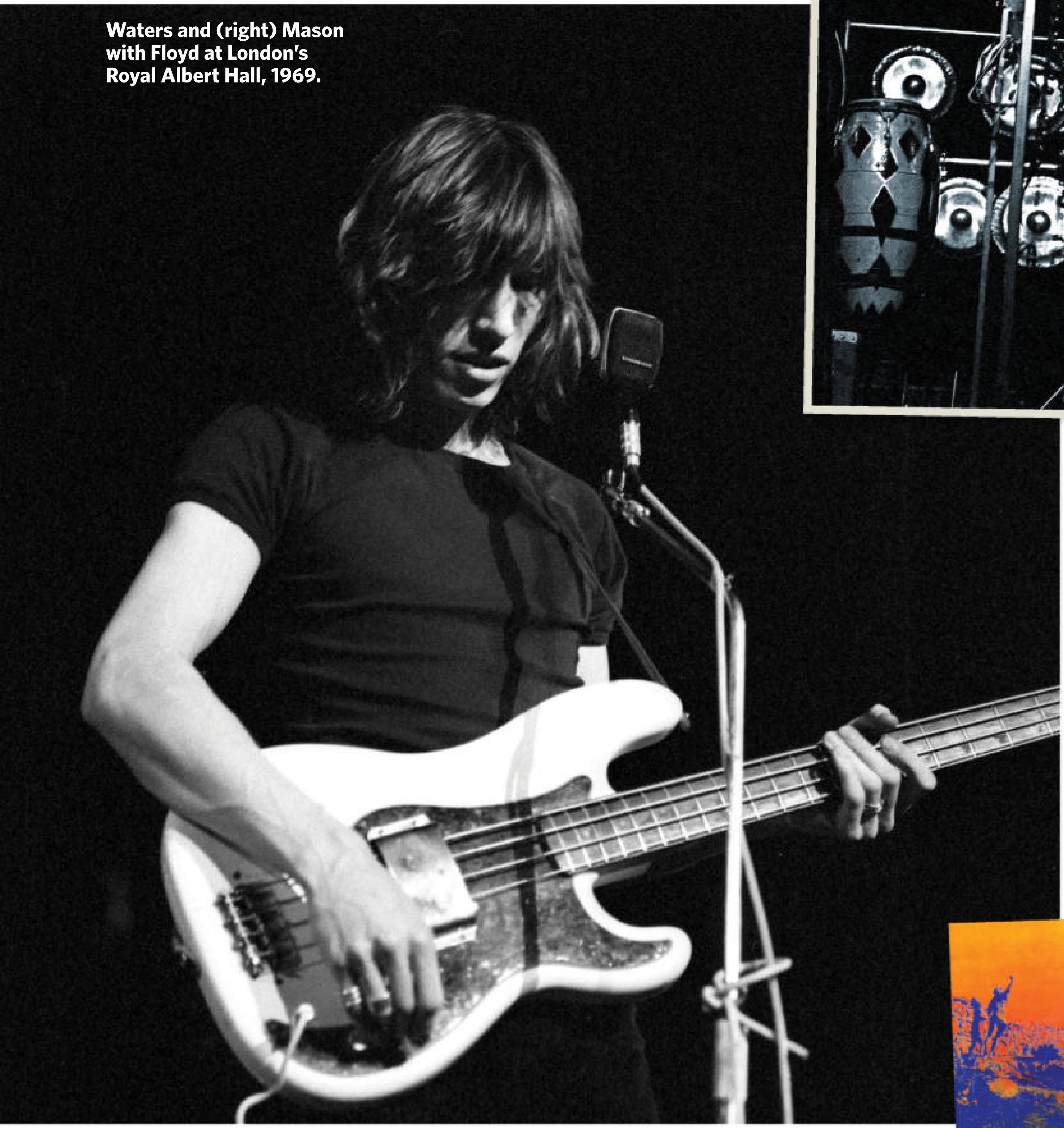
Pink Floyd launched the *A Saucerful Of Secrets* album on June 29, 1968, at the Midsummer High Weekend, a free festival in London's Hyde Park. Hippie elves Tyrannosaurus Rex and earnest folkie Roy Harper warmed up the audience before the Floyd unveiled their new epic. The festival's compere, DJ John Peel, listened to *A Saucerful Of Secrets* stoned, in a boat on the Serpentine in the park. "The sounds fell around our bodies with the touch of velvet and the taste of honey," he enthused in *Disc* magazine – with which he scored a mention in *Private Eye*'s Pseud's Corner column a week later.

Pink Floyd were delighted. "After Syd left, a lot of people thought we were over," said Mason. "Hyde Park made us feel like we were still relevant, still part of something."

Their appearance on Belgian TV show *Tienerklanken* from this time captures a group in artistic limbo, though. They mime a game of cricket to *See Emily Play*: Waters uses his bass as a bat, Mason bowls an invisible ball, Gilmour tries to ▷

Get it on... Roger Waters with Floyd in '68.

ALAMY x2



Waters and (right) Mason with Floyd at London's Royal Albert Hall, 1969.

catch it; and Wright looks like the world's feyest wicketkeeper. Waters, at least, appears committed to the charade, marching around the pitch with a rictus grin on his face and 'firing' his bass like a machine-gun. He looks determined to make it work, whatever *it* is.

Waters was similarly committed on stage. While his bandmates peered through curtains of hair and pondered their fashionable Gohill boots, Waters prowled like a caged tiger, wringing the neck of his Rickenbacker bass, and gleefully whacking a gong during *Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun*.

Unfortunately, Floyd's next single, the *Sgt Pepper*-ish *Point Me At The Sky*, again failed to make the UK Top 40.

Nick Mason recently performed this song with his touring group Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets. "I never imagined I'd be playing it live again, no," he said in 2020. "Its lack of success convinced us we should stop aiming for the Hit Parade and concentrate on making albums. *Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun* and *A Saucerful Of Secrets* showed the direction we should be going in. But we got rather distracted after that."

There were several distractions. Early in 1968, Waters claimed Pink Floyd were planning shows in a circus-style big top along with jugglers and escapologists. They'd also applied for a £5,000 grant from the Arts Council to fund a rock opera. "It would be written as a saga, like Homer's *The Iliad*," Waters told *Melody Maker*. "I'd like Arthur Brown to play The Demon King, with the Floyd providing the music."

Neither idea came to fruition, but both demonstrated Waters's desire to explore other mediums. In 1967 Pink Floyd had created a collage of electronic bleeps for conceptual artist John Latham's movie *Speak*. That was followed a few months later by some abstract drones for director Peter Sykes's film-noir *The Committee*. Nick Mason told me they'd also pitched to write the music for

"It was always wrong. There was always something that stopped it being perfect."

Roger Waters on *Zabriskie Point*

Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*: "I suspect it fell down not only because Pink Floyd weren't necessarily right for it, but also because the deal would have been so poor."

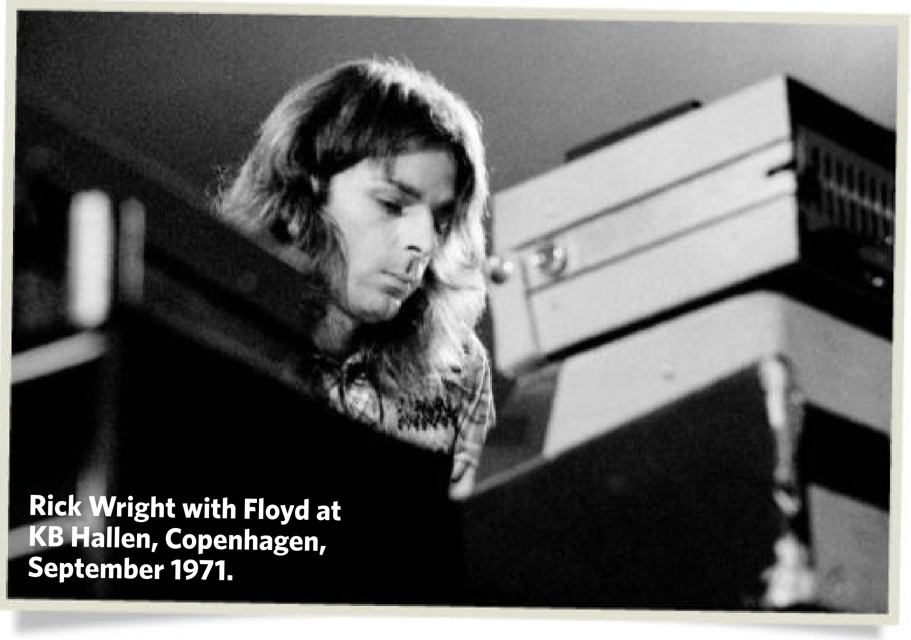
Outer space had become a theme, though. In July 1969, Floyd provided what David Gilmour called "spacey twelve-bar blues" to accompany the BBC's live broadcast of the first Moon landing.

It was a commission for another film, French director Barbet Schroeder's earthbound *More*, that became their next album. "I was a big fan of the first two Floyd records," Schroeder told me in 2006. "I thought they were the most extraordinary things I'd ever heard, and I wanted to work with them."

Schroeder flew to London with a copy of his film: a story of drug taking and thrill seeking in Ibiza, and containing a copious amount of artistic nudity. He convinced Pink Floyd to write the soundtrack (for the princely sum of £600 each), but with one caveat. "Barbet didn't want a soundtrack to go behind the movie," Waters said. "He wanted it literally. So if a radio was switched on in a car, he wanted the music to come out of the car. He wanted it to relate to exactly what was happening in the movie."

More was recorded in a nine-day marathon at London's Pye studios in early '69, and released in August. "A lot of the moods in the film were ideally suited to some of the rumblings, squeaks and sound textures we produced on a regular basis," suggested Mason. Perhaps surprisingly, *More*'s curious hybrid of pop, jazz, electronica and even heavy metal made the Top 10.

Crucially, songs such as the sweetly melodic *Cymbaline* and *Green Is The Colour* pushed David Gilmour's voice to the fore. "Doing film music was a path we thought we could follow in the future," said Gilmour. "It wasn't ▷



Rick Wright with Floyd at KB Hallen, Copenhagen, September 1971.

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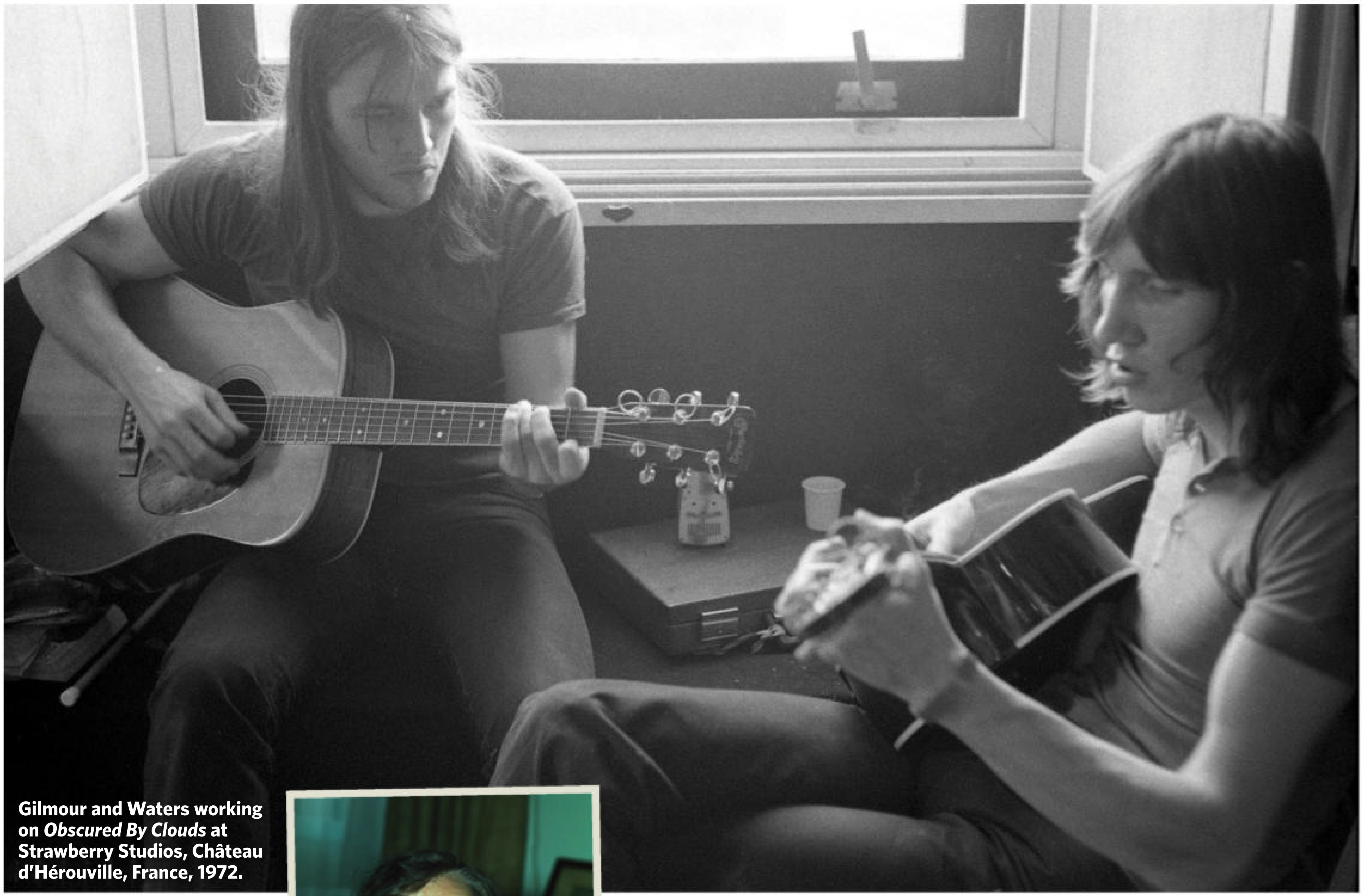
David Gilmour, Copenhagen, 1970.



Gilmour and Waters working on *Obscured By Clouds* at Strawberry Studios, Château d'Hérouville, France, 1972.

Barbet Schroeder, director of the 1969 film *More*, for which Floyd did the soundtrack.

that we wanted to stop being a rock'n'roll band, it was more of an exercise."

The band's record label, EMI, had indulged them so far, but after *More* "EMI thought we should cut out all the weird nonsense and get on with it".

This proved easier said than done. Floyd's experimentation was a cornerstone of their live show. As preferred venues for many bands, the Mecca and Top Rank ballrooms of 1966 and '67 had been replaced by university halls and underground clubs, whose woolly-haired, Afghan-coated patrons wanted sounds that transported them beyond the Top 40. Pink Floyd fitted the bill – and then some.

The band had composed two new conceptual works, *The Man* and *The Journey*, to illustrate a day in the life of an average man. "Sleep, work, play, start again," Waters explained, unwittingly prefacing themes explored later on *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. Both pieces were played live that summer, and utilised sound effects, elements of theatre and performance art. At London's Royal Festival Hall, a baffled audience watched a 20-minute sequence titled *Work* in which Pink Floyd constructed a table on stage. When it was complete, a roadie boiled a kettle and served the band tea.

"The idea was that the sawing and the hammering created a rhythm. It was interesting and fun and meant to provoke, but I don't think we were being great artists. There was an awful lot of floundering around," Gilmour admitted.

Sometimes, the performance extended beyond the stage, into the audience. During The Final Lunacy show at London's Royal Albert Hall, one of Floyd's art-school friends dressed up in a ghoulish latex costume, nicknamed The Tar Monster. He then dashed down the aisles spraying fake urine from a plastic phallus. "One unfortunate girl screamed and rushed from the auditorium," recalled Mason.

Yet beneath the art-school humour were musical ideas signposting the way ahead. The sound of the roadie's boiling kettle was later used in 1970's *Atom Heart Mother* album, and ringing alarm clocks from one section of *The Journey* made a reappearance on *The Dark Side Of The Moon*.

Capturing this live experimentation on record was difficult, though. *The Man* and *The Journey* were cast aside, and for Pink Floyd's next album Waters suggested each band member compose a solo piece. Waters managed two. One of them, *Several Species Of Small Furry Animal Gathered Together In A Cave And Grooving With A Pict*, was a headache-inducing collage of 'found' sounds and Waters babbling in a fake Scottish accent. It encapsulated the fly-by-night nature of the project; none of the band members heard each other's contributions until they were complete.

The two studio sides were then packaged with two sides of live recordings, and Pink Floyd's first double album, *Ummagumma*, was released in November 1969. The title came from Floyd sometime roadie Iain 'Imo' Moore, notorious for his lexicon of slang and Tourette's-like swearing. "It was one of my sayings," Imo told me. "'Ummagumma' means 'I'm-a-gonna…' as in 'ummagumma go home and, er, shag my girlfriend…'"

Today the band sound unconvinced by the album. "*Ummagumma* was interesting," allowed Mason, whose studio contribution *The Grand Vizier's Garden Party* included a protracted drum solo and his ex-wife Lindy playing flute.

"But Roger suggesting we write our own individual pieces felt like being back at school and told to write an essay."

"We were very good at jamming," said Gilmour, "but we couldn't quite translate that on record."

> **"We were very good at jamming but we couldn't quite translate that on record."**
>
> **David Gilmour**

MAIN: © PINK FLOYD MUSIC LTD; INSETS: GETTY

Breakfast and (inset) working with an early synth at Strawberry Studios, 1972.

"Ron [Geesin] waved his baton hopefully, and [the orchestra] made as much trouble as they could."

Nick Mason on recording *Atom Heart Mother*

However, *Ummagumma* reached No.3, their highest chart placing yet, and, despite its "weird nonsense", strengthened the band's position at EMI. Floyd had become the stars of EMI's hip new imprint Harvest Records (ahead of Deep Purple, the Edgar Broughton Band and Kevin Ayers), and officially Britain's biggest underground band.

Buoyed by a sense of freedom, they spent the next few months getting distracted again. In 1966, Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni had been fêted for his 'Swinging London' movie *Blow-Up*. Three years on, Antonioni hoped to repeat its success with *Zabriskie Point*, a muddled tale of student radicals in California, and asked Pink Floyd to write the music.

Floyd checked into Rome's palatial Hotel Massimo in November, with Antonioni footing the bill. Their work ethic was relaxed. "Every day we'd get up at about four-thirty in the afternoon," Waters told music magazine *Zigzag*. "We'd pop into the bar, and sit there until seven. Then we'd stagger into the restaurant, where we'd eat for two hours and drink…"

At 9pm the band dragged themselves to the studio, where they'd work until the morning. There were elements of *The Man* and *The Journey* in this approach: "Sleep, work, play, start again…" etc. But Antonioni was unimpressed by their efforts.

"It was always wrong, consistently," Waters complained. "There was always something that stopped it being perfect. You'd change whatever was wrong, and he'd still be unhappy."

The band and director parted company. Only three Floyd songs made the finished soundtrack, which was bumped up with music from the Grateful Dead and The Youngbloods. But nothing was wasted. A melancholy piano piece titled *Violent Sequence* that was rejected by Antonioni was later repurposed for *Dark Side*'s *Us And Them*. "We were now following a band policy of never throwing anything way," explained Mason.

Smarting from Antonioni's rejection, Pink Floyd went back on the road. Their stock had risen since their last American tour, when they could get gigs only at weekends and were marooned in cheap motels for days on end.

Finding ways to fill downtime on tour proved difficult. Having had a ringside seat for Syd Barrett's LSD-fuelled decline, they now generally stuck to dope or Scotch. Waters had taken his second, and presumably last, acid trip in New York. He'd only gone out to buy a sandwich, but was overwhelmed by a sudden, inexplicable fear while crossing Manhattan's Eight Avenue: "I ended up stood there, frozen and unable to move."

In future, Waters amused himself by setting his travelling companions a challenge and placing bets on the outcome. For one, roadie Chris Adamson (the first voice heard on *Dark Side*, saying: "I've been mad for fucking years…") agreed to eat a stone (6.35kg in today's money) of raw potatoes. "To give him his due, he got through two-and-half pounds before he said, 'Fuck it,'" recalled Waters.

Around the same time, Gilmour took up a challenge and rode a motorcycle through a hotel restaurant in Scottsdale, Phoenix. "Funnily enough, it didn't get any reaction at all," he said. ▷

***Zabriskie Point* director Michelangelo Antonioni.**

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Park life: all smiles in 1971.

"People were so frightened by it that they all stared very hard at their plates."

In April 1970, though, when the band began their latest US tour, it was all about the sensory overload of the music and the show. They headlined New York's underground hotspot Fillmore East, followed by shows at Philadelphia's equally hip Electric Factory and on to San Francisco's Fillmore West. *The Great Speckled Bird*, an underground newspaper in Atlanta, enthused about Floyd's "merging of electronics and psychedelics… rhythmic birdcalls and giant stereo footsteps that echo around the hall".

"We got good reviews everywhere," Mason told *Melody Maker*. "All the audiences said they'd never seen anything like us before."

During these dates they road-tested a new 23-minute instrumental, which would acquire several working titles – *The Amazing Pudding, Untitled Epic* and *Theme From An Imaginary Western* – in the weeks ahead.

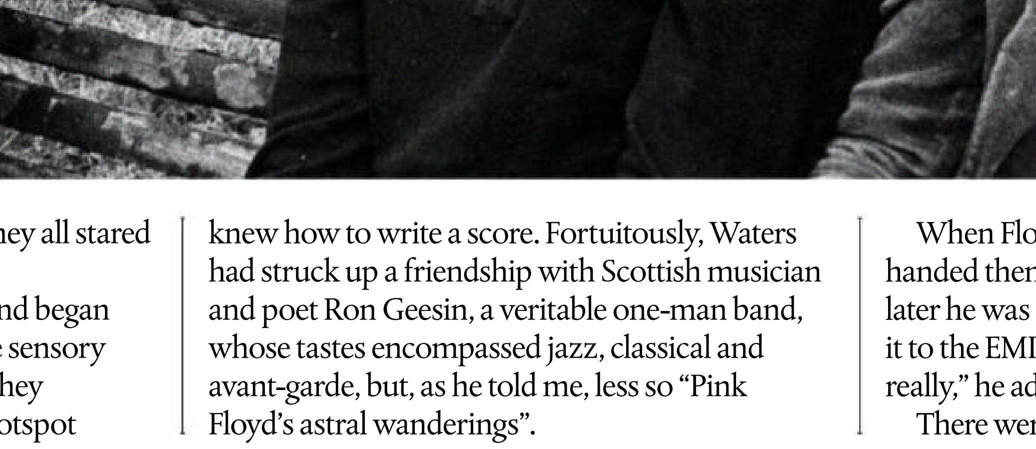
Floyd had already recorded the backing track at Abbey Road. But fleshing it out proved difficult. "We added, subtracted and multiplied the elements," said Mason. "But it lacked an essential something."

They decided the missing 'something' was a choir and orchestra. But none of the group knew how to write a score. Fortuitously, Waters had struck up a friendship with Scottish musician and poet Ron Geesin, a veritable one-man band, whose tastes encompassed jazz, classical and avant-garde, but, as he told me, less so "Pink Floyd's astral wanderings".

"EMI thought we should cut out all the weird nonsense and get on with it."

David Gilmour after Floyd recorded *More*

Geesin agreed to score Floyd's new work, but claimed the band had only a vague idea of what they wanted: "Dave [Gilmour] talked to me about the theme, and Rick went through a few phrases for the vocal section."



Orchestral manoeuvres: *Atom Heart Mother* collaborator Ron Geesin.

When Floyd returned from America, Geesin handed them the score as a fait accompli. Days later he was at Abbey Road attempting to explain it to the EMI Pops Orchestra. "I was a novice, really," he admitted later. "I was not a conductor."

There were already issues. Due to EMI's restrictions on splicing expensive one-inch recording tape, Mason and Waters had been forced to record the backing track in one wobbly take. "It lacked metronomic timekeeping," confessed the drummer. The piece also included some technically challenging parts and difficult phrasing.

Most of EMI's Pops Orchestra were hard-bitten classical players with little time for upstart rock groups. Ron Geesin was almost five years older than Pink Floyd, but the orchestra had him pegged as another useless hippie. "Ron waved his baton hopefully, and they made as much trouble as they could," recalled Mason.

When Geesin threatened to punch one of the brass players, it was suggested he take the rest of the day off. His replacement, John Alldis, was an experienced conductor who kept the orchestra in line, and used his own choir to supply wordless vocals. The end result was a 23 minute, 41 second concerto, fusing ghostly voices and booming brass with Gilmour's trademark string-bending guitar solos.

With one half of the LP in the can, the band created four

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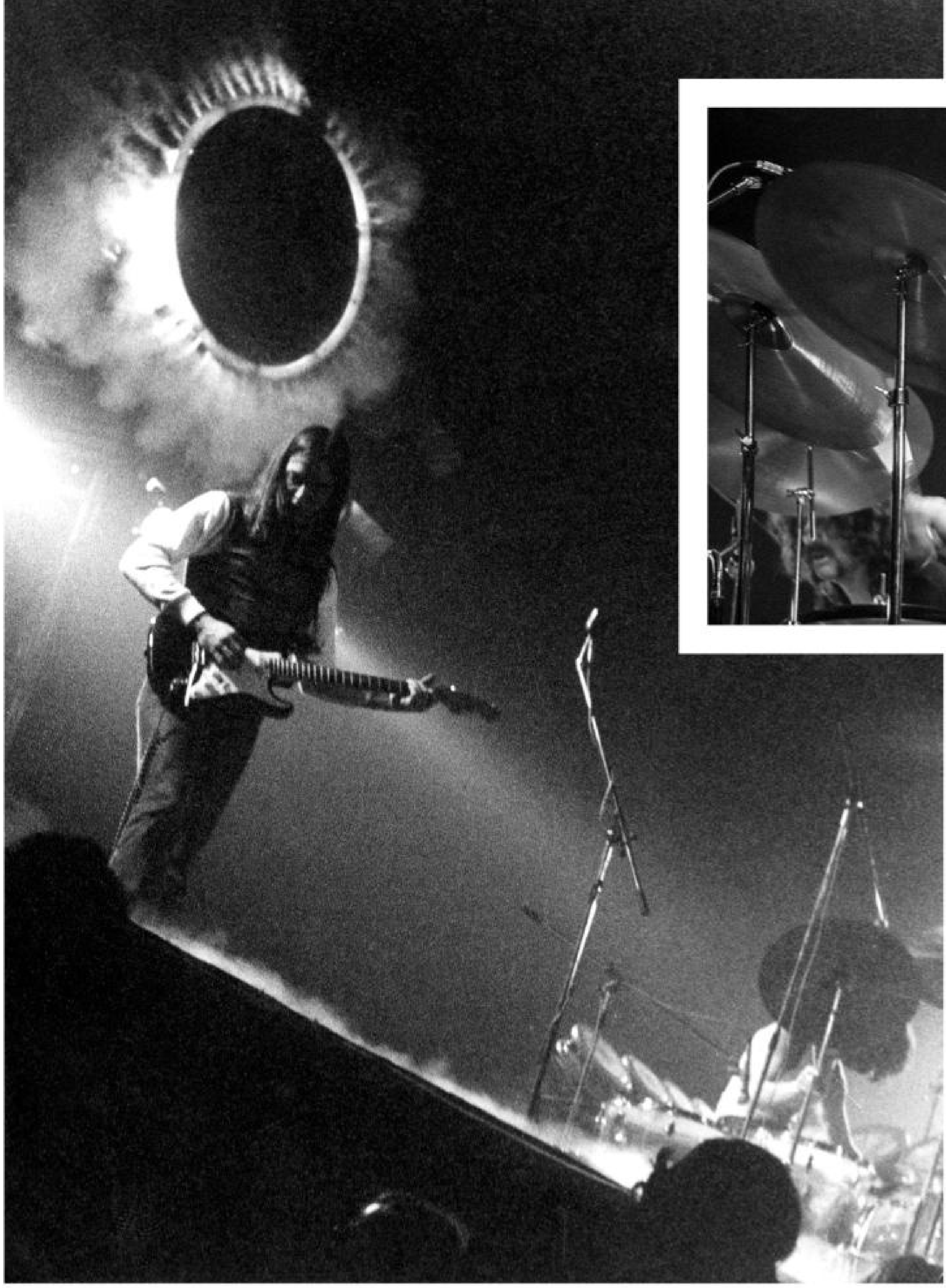

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Preparing for the *Moon* landing: Lanchester Polytechnic, Coventry, 1972.

pieces for the second side, "from scraps of things they had lying around", said Geesin. Once again they worked individually. *Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast*, composed mostly by Nick Mason, was a flashback to *The Man* and *The Journey*, with the sound of roadie Alan Styles frying eggs and bacon, boiling a kettle and rhapsodising about "toast, marmalade, cereal…"

The album was completed by July, but still lacked a title. Waters was backstage before a Floyd gig at London's Paris Theatre, discussing the problem, when Ron Geesin gave him a copy of the day's London newspaper the *Evening Standard* for inspiration. Waters leafed through the pages desultorily before spotting a story about Constance Ladell, a 56-year-old woman who was the first person to be fitted with a radioactive plutonium pacemaker. The headline read: 'Atom Heart Mother Named'.

Atom Heart Mother bore no relevance to the music, but it gave Floyd's problematic concerto and album a title. They had already commissioned their friends Storm Thorgerson and Aubrey 'Po' Powell, of design collective Hipgnosis, to create a cover for the album. Thorgerson and Waters were old schoolfriends and similarly single-minded and outspoken.

This wilful streak led to Hipgnosis photographing a baleful-looking Friesian cow in a field for the cover, and insisting that neither the band's name nor the title was to be on it. Floyd loved the contrariness and absurdity of the concept. Even more so after a senior EMI executive saw the cow and screamed: "Are you *mad*? Do you want to destroy this company?"

Pink Floyd might have been at loggerheads with their paymasters, but their audience listened merrily to Alan frying his breakfast in glorious stereo, and pondered the mystical meaning of "the cow… man", just as they'd done the nonsensical title 'Ummagumma'.

Released in October 1970, *Atom Heart Mother*, the album that some had feared would destroy EMI, went to No.1 in the UK.

Pink Floyd were always their own fiercest critics, though. At times both Gilmour and Waters have been brutally dismissive of this period in their shared history. "Absolute crap," was Waters's blunt verdict on *Atom Heart Mother*'s title track. Placed alongside the later *Time* or *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* it comes up wanting. But, like *Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun* and those deeply buried treasures on *More*, it was a stepping stone towards *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*. There would be no *Time* or *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* without them.

Sometimes those outside a band help those inside to examine their past work with fresh eyes. In 2018, former Blockheads guitarist Lee Harris and Roger Waters's bass-playing successor Guy Pratt asked Nick Mason if he would consider forming a band to play Pink Floyd's early material. But neither expected him to say yes.

Soon after, Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets (completed by former Orb keyboard player Dom Beken and Spandau Ballet guitarist/vocalist Gary Kemp) were performing *Atom Heart Mother, Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun* and other Floyd relics at venues around the UK. Pre-covid, the band were about to commence the sold-out

ALAMY

The *Meddle* inner sleeve photo: (l-r) Roger Waters, Nick Mason, David Gilmour, Richard Wright.

Echoes Tour in April 2020. The tour's name was taken from a lengthy composition, on 1971's *Meddle*, that defined the pre-*Dark Side* Floyd more than any other.

By the time the band started work on *Meddle*, they'd realised that their greatest strength was their collective songwriting. What Mason called "the rumblings, squeaks and sound textures" had been a subconscious way of disguising the fact that they couldn't compose pop songs like Barrett. But Pink Floyd had arrived at a new sound.

Barbet Schroeder believes that working under duress on the soundtrack album *More* taught Floyd a valuable lesson. "I do think it surprised Pink Floyd that they could make such a good album in two weeks," he said. "Perhaps they shouldn't have taken so long in the studio on all their other records."

The songs on *Meddle* were never hurried or forced, and the writing and performances were more streamlined, be it the ominous *One Of These Days*, or sleepy lullaby *A Pillow Of Winds*. *Echoes*, arguably the key composition on *Meddle*, took up the whole of the second side, and was testament to Floyd's experience and chemistry.

Gilmour had now established his place in the band. He was both a brilliant interpreter of Waters's big ideas, and an immovable force if those ideas threatened the music. It was this artistic tug-of-war that made *Echoes* so compelling. Its shifting moods and movements deployed eerie sound effects and experimentation. But at its beating heart was a simple melody and Gilmour and Rick Wright's combined lead vocals. Equally important, the lyrics explored what Roger Waters now called "inner space"; human emotions and real life, instead of "airy-fairy mystical bollocks".

"*Atom Heart Mother* felt like the end of something, and *Meddle* felt like the beginning of something else."

David Gilmour

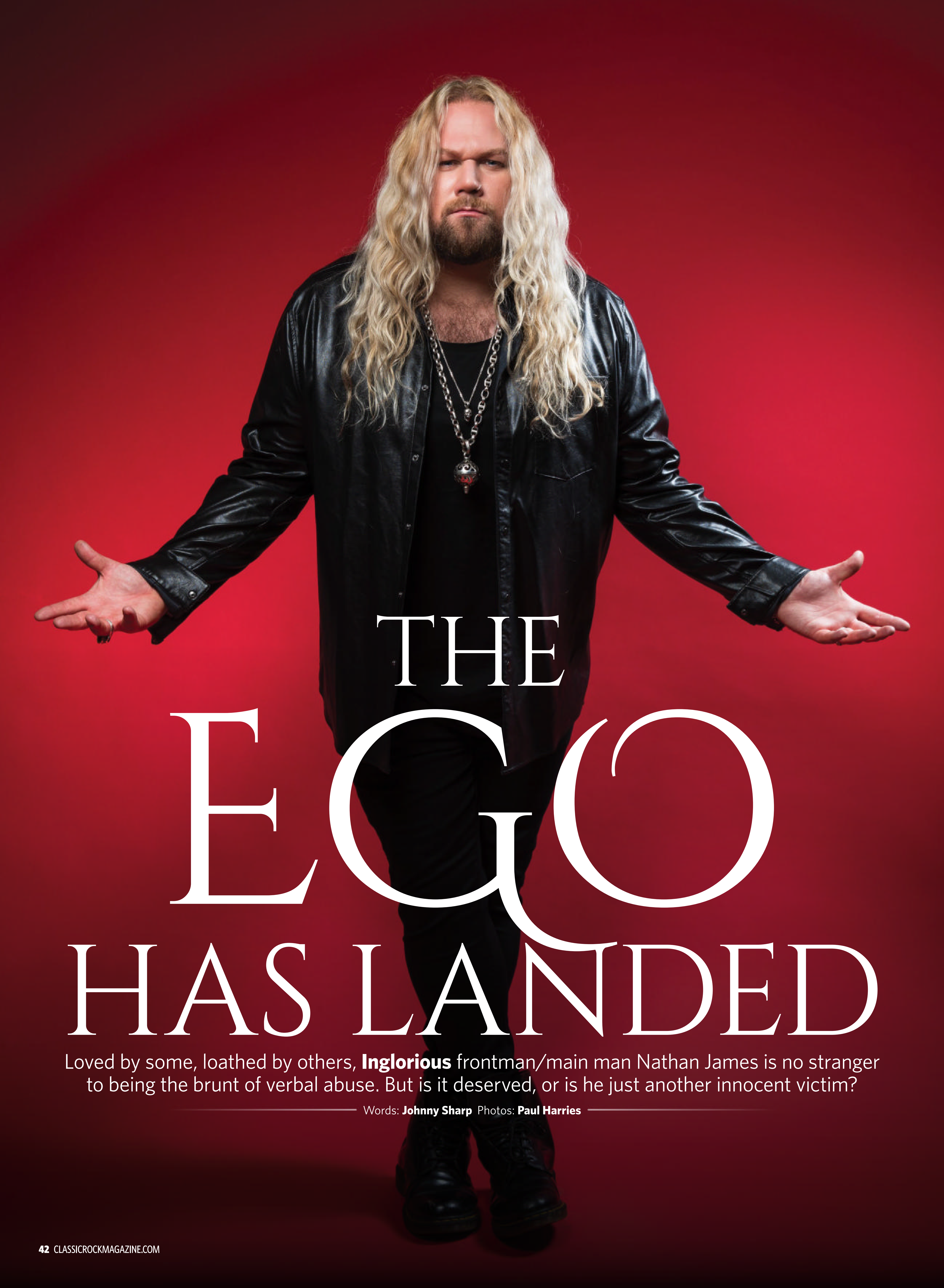
Its inspiration came from Waters's early time in London and that strange, uncertain period immediately after Syd Barrett's departure. Waters was living in a flat in Shepherd's Bush. Every morning, he watched a stream of commuters heading, like worker ants, towards the Tube station; every evening, he'd watch them all come back again. It was a bleak reminder of the working life he might have had if Pink Floyd hadn't survived the loss of Barrett and he'd had to become an architect.

"The lyrics are all about making connections with other people," he explained. "About the potential that human beings have for recognising each other's humanity."

This included making a vital connection with the rest of Pink Floyd. "*Meddle* was the first album we had worked on together as a band since *A Saucerful Of Secrets*, three years earlier," said Mason. "We finally realised what we were good at and what we should be doing."

"It would become a template for everything else after," added David Gilmour. "*Atom Heart Mother* felt like the end of something, and this felt the beginning of something else."

By 1971, the second stage of Pink Floyd's long, strange trip had reached its destination. The next stop was *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, and there would be no turning back.



THE EGO HAS LANDED

Loved by some, loathed by others, **Inglorious** frontman/main man Nathan James is no stranger to being the brunt of verbal abuse. But is it deserved, or is he just another innocent victim?

Words: **Johnny Sharp** Photos: **Paul Harries**

For one band member to leave could be regarded as a misfortune. For two to go looks like carelessness. To lose three – on the same day – sounds more like a conspiracy. Either way, even Oscar Wilde would have struggled to script the mass walkout that befell London five-piece Inglorious at the end of 2018, shortly before the release of their third album, *Ride To Nowhere*. With the album ready and tour dates a few weeks away, overnight they were down to a duo.

Thankfully, two years on the story arc has turned upwards, and their fourth album, *We Will Ride*, a tour de force of vintage hard rock cut from the Purple-hued cloth of the greats, is their best yet.

Inglorious's resurgence is testament to the indefatigable drive of founder and frontman Nathan James. But things got worse before they got better. At first the departures of guitarists Drew Lowe and Andreas Eriksson and bassist Colin Parkinson were announced with customary diplomacy. Then Parkinson, now fronting his own project Temple Of One, gave an interview with *Sleaze Roxx*, in which he criticised Inglorious as being "more of a theatre show than a band", dismissed it as "Nathan's project" and referred darkly to "bitchy comments".

Within 24 hours James responded, via a Facebook live chat that one of his former colleagues was kind enough to upload to YouTube. In a fierce rant he took a swipe at unnamed former colleagues, among other things spitting: "Do not use my fucking name to get press." He went on to take a distinctly immodest view of the situation ("The only reason anyone knows who these people are is because of their affiliation with me") and observe, faux-sympathetically: "They don't all have four-octave ranges and sing like me, so it must be hard." He concluded by raging: "Never, *ever* underestimate me."

Soon afterwards, he apologised, to the same website that ran Parkinson's comments, admitting that he felt "embarrassed and ashamed", and has since removed his tirade from the web. But was this the mask slipping and an inflated ego bursting free? Not that this magazine has ever shied away from giving a platform to charismatic rock frontmen with bulging reserves of self-regard and a tendency to piss off their colleagues.

Whatever your view, when *Classic Rock* makes (virtual) contact with Nathan James he appears to be the model of easygoing humility. He is not yet able to see the funny side of the episode we've just described, though.

"I was going through an incredibly low time," he offers. "Three band members left in the space of a day, and everyone was expecting me to act like nothing had happened.

He pauses before continuing: "I was having a breakdown. I feared for my mental health, and everyone around me did as well. It was the first time in my life I'd thought about committing suicide. "My family and my management took my phone off me, asked me to go and seek help.

"I was in a desperate place. This band that I'd set up and I'd got together, and in the beginning I'd bankrolled until we had our deal, to have that thrown back in my face so publicly was gutting. And so poorly handled. If people wanted to leave they could have had an adult discussion about it. It didn't have to be so vindictive."

You sense that for all James's other achievements – at the time of the Inglorious split he was touring arenas with Jeff Wayne's *War Of The Worlds* live show, for example, and he recently announced that he'll be fronting a supergroup with Stryper's Michael Sweet and Whitesnake's Joel Hoekstra – Inglorious is his real labour of love. And one that he didn't want to risk falling apart again when he put together what he calls "Inglorious mark three".

"I knew I had to surround myself with great friends," he says, "and that's exactly what I did, with two guitarists I'd known for years and respected hugely. I wanted a great team around me, and then I wanted to focus on writing something great."

James and Inglorious drummer Phil Beaver, another founding member, were joined by teenage guitar ace Danny Delacruz and rhythm counterpart Dan Stevens, along with new bassist Vinnie Colla. Then the keenness of producer Romesh Dodangoda (Bring Me The Horizon, Bullet For My Valentine, Motörhead and more) to get involved behind the controls proved to be another boost. Maybe he heard what we're hearing: snarling, wind-in-the-hair hard rock tunes built on full-fat riffs and nagging hooks to underpin tall tales of femme fatales, evil deeds and dark thoughts.

Covid restrictions meant the band could only go into Dodangoda's Cardiff studio one by one instead of all together, but it also meant singer and lyricist James was home a lot more. While forced to do that he developed a serious Netflix habit. "My niche was crime documentaries and thrillers," he says. That interest inspired songs such as *Cruel Intentions*, which addresses someone "taking loved ones from their families" and "living a fantasy where you were born to die". "That one is specifically about a famous serial killer," James explains, "and a couple of lines are taken from what was read out when he was sentenced."

Other songs echo the woman-done-me-wrong tropes of 70s blues rock, but in James's eyes it's born of admiration for bad girls rather than resentment.

"I'm lucky enough to be surrounded by strong female figures in my life," he says. "And I really enjoy writing about badass women. That crosses over with the crime obsession: the title track on the album is about a seventeenth-century highwaywoman called Katherine Ferrers. She was a fascinating character."

James is no stranger to the concept of heroes and villains, his career having been kick-started by reality TV: he was rejected on *The Voice* in 2012, but later that year he reached the live final of Andrew Lloyd Webber's West End audition show *Superstar*. He has said that the experience helped him develop a thick skin. Which is just as well, as, particularly since that public rant in 2018, he's had to field plenty of online flak.

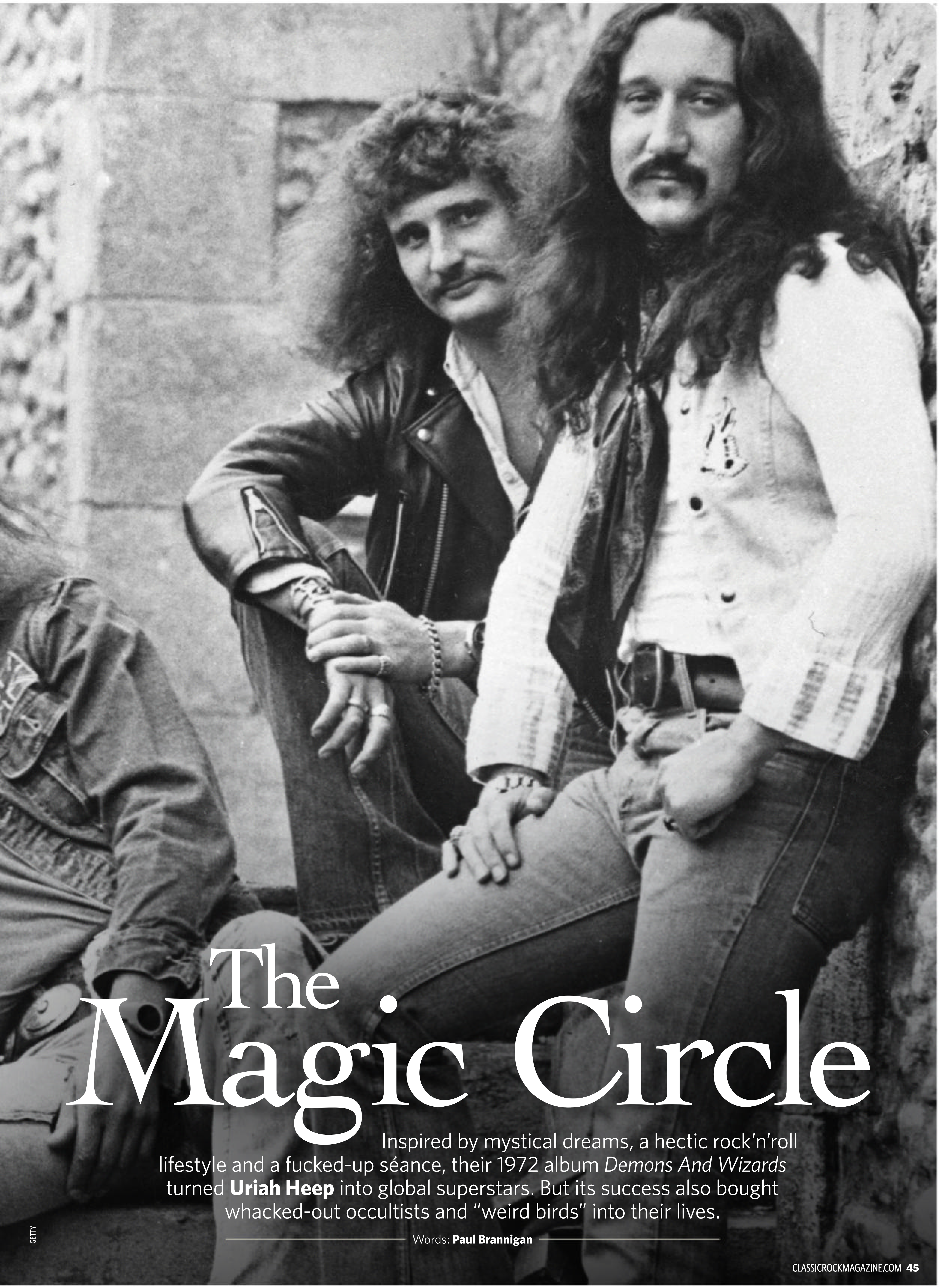
"I've had all sorts. I've had death threats on social media."

Nathan James

"I've had all sorts," he says. "I've had death threats on social media. And when I announced my last guitar player he even received racial abuse – he's half-Filipino. I remember thinking: 'God, is this the rock community?!' I'm just a singer in a rock band, ha ha! I'm not Trump! Do you know what I mean?"

Still, if the best revenge is living well – and coming back stronger creatively – then Inglorious could hardly have offered a more convincing response. Don't @ them, just listen.

We Will Ride is available via Frontiers Records.



The Magic Circle

Inspired by mystical dreams, a hectic rock'n'roll lifestyle and a fucked-up séance, their 1972 album *Demons And Wizards* turned **Uriah Heep** into global superstars. But its success also bought whacked-out occultists and "weird birds" into their lives.

Words: **Paul Brannigan**

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Wizards in the studio, demons on stage: (l-r) Lee Kerslake, David Byron, Gary Thain (top), Ken Hensley, Mick Box.

For British rock bands in the early 1970s, a sneering, patronising review in US magazine *Rolling Stone* was considered something of a badge of honour. In it, Led Zeppelin's self-titled debut album was dismissed as "dull", "redundant" and "prissy". The "clubfooted" riffs on *Deep Purple In Rock* were seen as evidence that these "quiet nonentities" lacked "both expertise and intuition". Black Sabbath's first album was labelled "inane", "wooden" and "plodding", the band that became the most influential in the history of heavy metal written off as "Just like Cream! But worse." *Rolling Stone*'s most scathing notice, however, was about Uriah Heep's debut album, 1970's *Very 'Eavy, Very 'Umble*: "If this group makes it," wrote one Melissa Mills, "I'll have to commit suicide."

Today Uriah Heep guitarist Mick Box can afford to look back and laugh. A candidate for the most chipper man in rock'n'roll, the 73-year-old cheerfully admits that he's "never been one to listen to critics too much". "It's difficult to care about criticism about what your band is lacking when you're being called back on stage for five encores every night," he points out with a hearty chuckle.

> **"We tried to summon spirits of the dead. It got a bit freaky."**
>
> **Mick Box**

Inspired by a love of The Kinks, the Small Faces, The Who and Johnny Kidd & The Pirates, Walthamstow-born Box formed his first band, The Stalkers, in the mid-60s while still a teenager. By the time Bobby Moore hoisted the Jules Rimet Trophy aloft at Wembley Stadium on the evening of July 30, 1966 when England won the World Cup, The Stalkers had become Spice. At some point late in 1969 the band caught the attention of influential manager/producer/publisher Gerry Bron. It was at Bron's insistence that the youngsters changed their name once more, to Uriah Heep, an 'umble, obsequious character in Charles Dickens's 1850 novel *David Copperfield*. Bron then installed the group in Hanwell Community Centre in West London to assemble songs for their debut album. Through the facility's walls they could hear the Mk II line-up of Deep Purple prepping for what would be their *In Rock* album.

By their own admission, on their first three albums the young Uriah Heep were "just thrashing about trying to find a direction". Their unfairly maligned *Very 'Eavy, Very 'Umble* album, mixing folk, blues, jazz and hard rock, was followed by two studio albums in 1971: the progressive rock-inclined *Salisbury* – on which multi-talented keyboard player Ken Hensley began to eclipse Box and frontman David Byron as the band's main songwriter – and *Look At Yourself*, the first release on Gerry Bron's new record label Bronze Records. In between the two releases, on March 26, '71 Uriah Heep played their first show in the US, supporting Three Dog Night, in front of 16,000 people at the State Fairground's Coliseum in Indianapolis, Indiana. For the Londoners it was a first glimpse of the infinite possibilities of rock stardom. "When we got there, and saw all the limos and groupies, it was mind-boggling for us," Hensley said later.

"There was never a feeling of being overawed by it all," Box insisted to Heep biographer Dave Ling. "We all felt that this is where we should be. The American audience loved us from the first minute onwards. Believe me, lots of champagne was cracked open on that first night."

When the group returned to the US for the second time, in January 1972, they were booked to open for Deep Purple, their noisy neighbours from Hanwell Community Centre. Their gregarious guitarist, meanwhile, was taking advantage of his group's burgeoning reputation by thumbing through local phone directories and placing calls to random young ladies, inviting them along to gigs and parties. "You'd tell the bird you were in Uriah Heep, and next minute the hotel was full of women," Box recalled cheerfully.

But such a lifestyle wasn't for everyone. On January 31, upon completing the final date of the Deep Purple tour, bassist Mark Clarke quit the band, having joined only four months previously.

"Mark jumped ship because he couldn't deal with the stresses of the touring we were doing,

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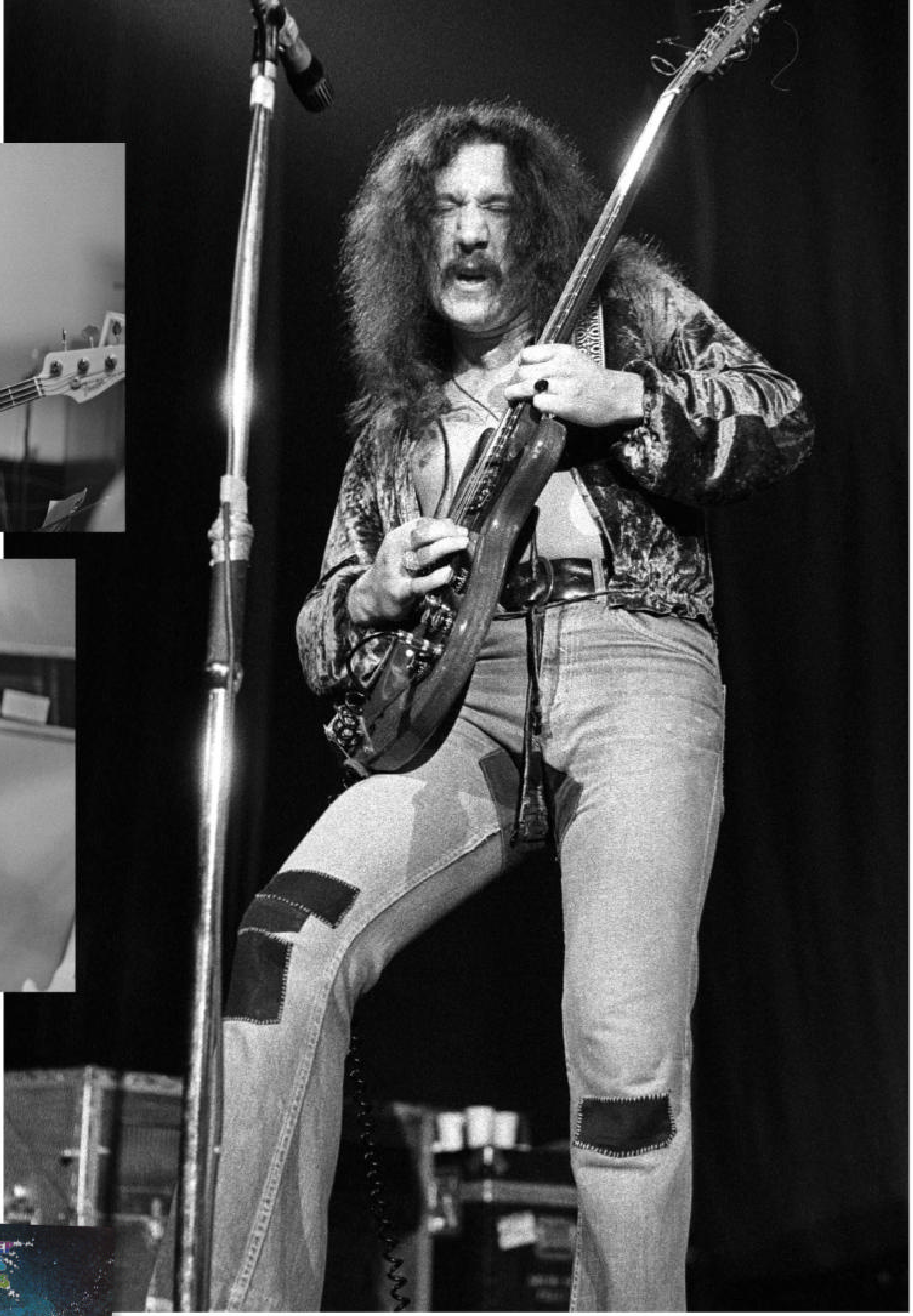

which were excessive, I have to say," Box says. "It was a mad, mad, mad time for us all. Mark felt that he just could not keep up with it, that he was going to have a full-on nervous breakdown if he stuck around any longer."

Although Clarke's time in the band was short, the ex-Colosseum bassist did make one lasting and significant contribution to Uriah Heep, writing a striking, harmonised middle eight for a new Ken Hensley composition titled *The Wizard*, based on a fantastical recurring dream he'd had every night for a week.

"I remember Ken playing *The Wizard* on an acoustic guitar in the back of our van," says Box. "It was the first time I'd heard anyone play guitar with a drop-D tuning. He couldn't find a middle eight, so Mark Clarke wrote that, and the whole song sounded so good to everyone. I think we all knew it was something special."

Gerry Bron, too, heard potential in Hensley's whimsical power ballad. Ahead of their second visit to the US, Heep were rushed into Lansdowne Studios in Holland Park, where they tracked the song (and single B-side *Why*) in a matter of hours. Before the session ended, *The Wizard*'s semi-acoustic intro was beefed up with the addition of an unusual instrument – the studio kettle.

"We were making a cup of tea, and had the studio door open, and as we were listening back to the intro of the song we heard the whistle, and thought: 'Hang on!" Mick Box recalls. "We went into the kitchen, recorded the kettle whistle two or three times and got it re-tuned to a high C. That's the note you hear at the beginning of the song."

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"It got heavy, and very hedonistic, totally decadent. We had bodyguards outside each of our hotel rooms."

Mick Box

While Bronze Records readied *The Wizard* for an international release, Heep bedded in Mark Clarke's replacement Gary Thain with a five-night stand at the Whiskey A Go Go club in Los Angeles in February '72. New Zealander Thain had come from the Keef Hartley Band, and clicked instantly with Heep's other new addition, drummer Lee Kerslake, who had joined just three months previously. The pair's obvious chemistry, and superior musical ability, immediately elevated the whole band to a new level.

"Now we finally had a real steam engine of a rhythm section," Box says, admiringly. "Having those two powerhouses behind us provided a wonderful foundation for the band. Lee was a fantastic drummer, and Gary would come up with these great bass lines that never got in the way of the melody of the song but always seemed to enhance it. It was an incredible knack. It was a real pleasure to work with the pair of them. Everything just clicked into place."

In mid-March, back in England the quintet returned to Lansdowne Studios to complete work on their fourth album.

"Everyone was focused," says Box. "We were recording in London, which was nice, and the chemistry in the band was bar none. There were no personality clashes, no factions fighting for different things, no diversions."

"There was a magic in that combination of people that created so much energy and enthusiasm," Ken Hensley later noted. "We all wanted the same thing, were all willing to make the same sacrifices to achieve it and we were all very committed."

As he had done on *Look At Yourself*, keyboard player Hensley led the sessions, bringing five

They cant all be 'appy days: David Byron and Mick Box in Stockholm, May 1974.

"Someone would nip out to the shop, and come back to find another song written. [*Demons*] was such an easy album to record."

Mick Box

new songs to the table. As with *The Wizard*, the album's foundation stone, the songs largely had fantasy themes. The heavy-grooving *Rainbow Demon* spoke of a rider on a crimson horse, '*possessed by some distant calling*'; the delicate *Paradise* told of a heavy-hearted young man's quest for true love; its multi-part companion piece, the dramatic hymnal epic *The Spell*, featured heavenly choral vocals, a stunning Hensley slide guitar solo, and gloriously portentous lyrics: '*You will never break the spell. I'll summon all the fires of hell*'. The spooky, organ-driven, *Circle Of Hands*, meanwhile, was inspired by a brush with the supernatural.

"It was born out of a séance we were invited to by some girls in Italy," Box reveals. "It all got a bit out of hand, a bit freaky. These things start out as a bit of fun, then you start to get a bit uncomfortable, and then it's: 'Bloody hell, I'm getting out of here!' That was the first and last time we tried to summon spirits of the dead. We were dabbling where we should never have dabbled."

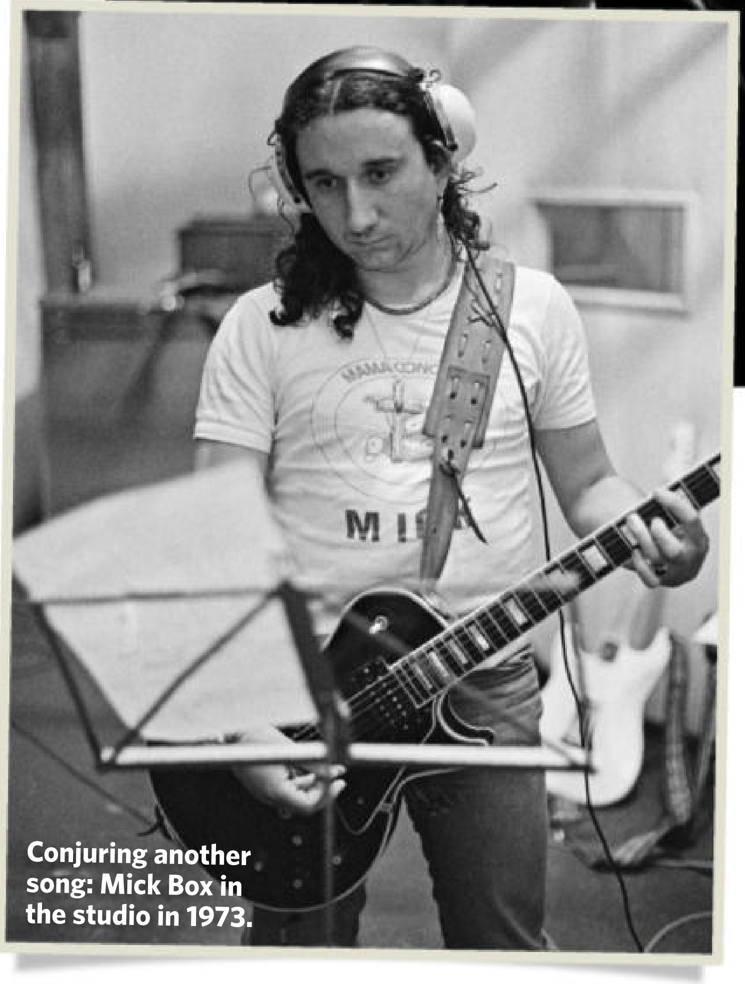
The down-to-earth guitarist brought rather more grounded tunes to the studio: the bluesy, Zeppelin-esque *All My Life*, the hard-riffing *Poet's Justice*, originally conceived as an acoustic track, and the driving *Traveller In Time*. All three songs were fleshed out in jam sessions with David Byron and Lee Kerslake.

"I'd have riffs knocking around, and maybe a verse, and when I took them into rehearsals those two would jump on them and suddenly we'd have another song," Box marvels. "They came together very quickly, as we were very attuned to one another. It was almost too good to be true. Someone would nip out to the shop, and come back to find another song written. It was such an easy album to record."

"There was nothing between us and the music," Hensley told the Classic Rock Revisited website in 2016. "This liberated my creativity. And the fact that FM radio in America was pioneering the musical freedom trend made it even more inspiring."

For all five musicians, and Gerry Bron, Heep's self-appointed sixth member, the choice of a single from the album was a no-brainer: everything about the rollicking *Easy Livin'* screamed 'radio hit'. Written by Hensley in just 15 minutes, it was a tongue-in-cheek reflection of outsider perceptions of the band's lifestyle.

"It had excitement written all over it," says Box. "I thought the guitar sound was fantastic, it was so up-front, and aggressive and pumping like mad. The title came from a conversation we had in the van. We were in the north of England, driving down to London to listen to some recordings in the studio before going to the airport to fly to America, and someone said: 'This is easy living, isn't it?' as a joke, a piss-take. But it resonated with Ken. It wasn't a song that we over-thought."



Conjuring another song: Mick Box in the studio in 1973.

With a sleeve featuring artwork by the noted fantasy artist Roger Dean, *Demons And Wizards* was released on May 19, 1972, and peaked at No.20 in the UK chart the following month. Initial reviews were positive: "*Demons And Wizards* has got to be the party album of the year so far," *Rolling Stone* raved. "They may have started out as a thoroughly dispensable neo-Creak & Blooze outfit, but at this point Uriah Heep are shaping up into one hell of a first-rate modern rock band." It was the August release of *Easy Livin'* – singled out by *Rolling Stone* writer Mike Saunders as a "flat out fuzz-tone punk rocker" – that turned the album into a global

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smash. Although *Easy Livin'* failed to chart in the UK, it became a Top-20 hit across mainland Europe, and peaked on *Billboard*'s Hot 100 at No.39 on September 23. By the end of October, *Demons And Wizards* had reached No.23 on the *Billboard* 200 album chart.

"Hearing the song on US radio was immense," Box says. "But you had to get out there and work it. We started out touring in the Midwest, the strongest rock market, and let the music filter out to the coasts. Then things started moving very, very fast. A hit single is like a small boulder rolling down a hill, gathering moss, and by the time it gets to the bottom it's huge. It wasn't long before we were doing ten-thousand-seaters right across America, and had Lear jets and limos at every airport. It was an absolutely amazing time."

But there was a darker side to the band's US success. With tour posters promising that *Demons And Wizards* "performs mentalingus on you", Heep began to encounter "freaky people" coming out of the woodwork at their shows. In a 1973 *NME* interview, David Byron related a tale of being visited in Detroit, the band's biggest market, by the city's messianic underground leader, Jaggers, a stick-thin, Mick Jagger-obsessed guy wearing a long black cloak and white face-paint.

"He came in and shut the door and said: 'Lock it'," Byron recalled. "He said: 'You see, the thing is, the people think I'm dead. And that's why I dress in black. If anybody asks if you've seen me, say you haven't.' It turned out he was a lunatic. And this goes on and on and on in every major town in America.

"These birds with cherry-red lipstick come up and say: 'Hey man, you're really *cosmic*. It's so heavy. And I really dig it… I always listen to your message.' Crap. All these weird birds got hold of our old ladies' phone numbers and addresses, and they started doing all these ghostly trips when we're away. We were getting so many weird letters that it was driving us round the bend. It just started to do us in."

"These birds with cherry-red lipstick come up and say: 'Hey man, you're really *cosmic*.'"

David Byron

"It got very, very silly," Box admits. "We got to the point where we had bodyguards outside each of our hotel rooms, particularly in the Midwest. It got heavy, and very hedonistic, totally decadent. All the stories you hear about being a successful rock band in America are all true. And I can't tell you any of them! Ha ha! I enjoyed it for what it was, but I never felt like it would last forever at that level."

The guitarist's caution proved prescient. Before embarking on a two-month US tour scheduled to run from October 13 to December 17, the band were rushed into Lansdowne Studios to record a new studio album. Released in November, *The Magician's Birthday* reached No.28 in the UK and No.31 in the US. But its short-term success came with long-term costs. Ken

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Enjoying the easy livin' in '73, but it couldn't last: (l-r) Ken Hensley, Lee Kerslake, Mick Box, Gary Thain, David Byron.

Hensley described the making of the album as "frustrating" and "the beginning of the end", claiming that a number of his songs were unfinished, rush-released before being properly signed off. Mick Box too was unhappy with the pressure exerted on the band. Looking back, the unassuming guitarist lays the blame squarely at the feet of management.

"Doing *The Magician's Birthday* that quickly was all about capitalising on the success of *Demons And Wizards*," he reflects. "If you want my honest opinion, I think that was down to management greed. Gerry Bron was pushing us so hard that there was no attention to anyone's personal life or health. It was 'Go! Go! Go!' I can understand an element of that, because when we first started off he put a lot of money in, taking out full-page ads in the music papers, buying us a lot of equipment, and putting us on a twenty-pounds-a-week wage. So he did invest in us. But by the time we reached *Demons And Wizards* we'd paid him back tenfold, and he was still pushing for more, more, more. There were demands for another hit single, which got draining, as we always saw ourselves as an albums band. Also, as Ken was having great success with his songs, management singled him out and started only listening to what he had to say, which created animosity with the rest of us. And then the wheels started falling off."

It is perhaps some measure of the high expectations raised by the success of *Demons And Wizards* that Uriah Heep are sometimes considered to be the 'nearly men' of British hard rock. It's true that they never threatened to match the success of Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath or Queen, and on a statistical level never again came as close to cracking the mainstream as they did with their fourth studio album. But 45 million worldwide album sales and a touring presence in 61 countries are hardly indicators of failure. Unfailingly honest and unpretentious, Box can concede that, at points in their career, Uriah Heep "didn't stay true to their platform". But having racked up nine UK Top 40 albums, and been on the *Billboard* 200 no fewer than 15 times, his band have enjoyed career highs that precious few modern rock bands could ever aspire to. Crucially, Box is still loving life in the band he began writing for 50 years ago.

"*Demons And Wizards* means a lot to me... Creatively it was the band at its height."

Mick Box

"We've got a great foundation," he says cheerfully, "with a history and songs that have stood the test of time, and we're still writing new music which the fans are enjoying as much as ever."

However, he's not unaware of the esteem in which *Demons And Wizards* is still held, as was evidenced when Uriah Heep performed the album in full in the US for its fortieth anniversary.

But it's an album holding bitter-sweet memories for the guitarist, not least because four of the musicians who played on it – David Byron, Gary Thain, Lee Kerslake and Ken Hensley – are no longer alive. Singer Bryon passed away in 1985 due to alcohol-related health issues, bassist Thain succumbed to a heroin overdose 10 years earlier, in September 2020 Kerslake lost his battle with prostate cancer, and most recently Hensley passed away (in November 2020) following a short illness.

Roger Dean's cover artwork still hangs in the front room of Box's London home, and he's signed enough copies of the album over the years to be aware of its significance to fans.

"There's something on every Uriah Heep album that I can look back on with fondness," he says, "but *Demons And Wizards* means a lot to me. Where we were as a unit, creatively, it was the band at its height, with that line-up. Listening back to the album through the speakers at Lansdowne back in 1972, we felt like we had something special, but that was just within our inner circle. After that you just hope that it might take on a life of its own and become successful. Which, to our immense gratitude, it did.

"I know how much that music means so much to so many different people, and it's humbling," the guitarist continues. "With the Roger Dean cover, it was the first time that the music and the lyrics and the artwork were intrinsically linked, and I think that contributed to its success. But then, funnily enough, it was *Easy Livin'*, with no mythical lyrics whatsoever, which was the hit that opened up the world stage to us. If that song taught us anything, it's that sometimes in this business it's best not to over-think."

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DETROIT LEANING

With some of Motor City's iconic musicians on board for the thrill ride, **Alice Cooper**'s new album *Detroit Stories* is "an homage to the place to which we owe our careers".

Words: **Ian Fortnam**

Detroit, Michigan's Motown, shaped both Vincent Furnier and Alice Cooper. Evangelist's son Vince was born and raised in the city. Asthmatic from birth, he suffered with ill-health. Yet, while active in his father's Christian Restorationist church, his soul was awakened to significantly more earthly delights.

"I discovered rock'n'roll when I was about six," he recalls. "My uncle played me a Chuck Berry song and I was like: 'Wow, what was that?' It was the first song I ever heard that was driven by guitar rather than piano or horns. It was different, and it just stuck with me. Real, straight-ahead hard rock's in the Detroit DNA somehow. It's where they make the cars, it's where all the heavy machinery is, and people end up wanting their music like that."

As the sixties dawned, Detroit offered everything that young Vince desired from life: "It was always a good sports city and it was always a good music city." But his parents, concerned for their son's health, had other ideas.

Following a move to California, the Furniers ultimately settled in Phoenix, where Arizona's arid conditions helped Vince blossom steadily from sickly child to stalwart member of Cortez High School's track, field and cross-country teams.

In 1964, having fallen under the spell of The Beatles, Vince formed The Earwigs with fellow Cortez track team members John Speer, Phil Wheeler, (art class surrealist) Dennis Dunaway and (the band's only musician) Glen Buxton on guitar. Impressed by the kind of female attention that standing on a stage brought them, The Earwigs persisted (entering talent shows and local Battle Of The Bands competitions), became The Spiders (enjoying a local hit single with *Don't Blow Your Mind*) and then The Nazz, before relocating to Santa Monica in '67. Finally settling on a line-up of Buxton (lead guitar), Dunaway (bass), Neal Smith (drums) and Michael Bruce (rhythm guitar), Vince renamed the band and – crucially – himself, Alice Cooper.

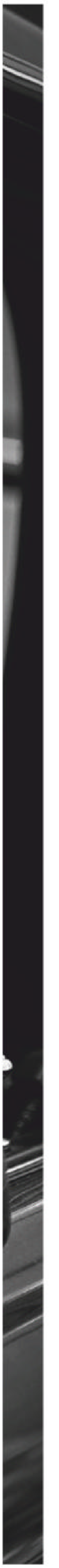
Setting out to simultaneously freak out and out-freak Los Angeles, the quintet dressed up, messed up and generally outraged all that they surveyed. They signed to Frank Zappa's Straight Records and recorded a pair of feet-finding, if largely audience-baffling, albums: *Pretties For You* ('69) and *Easy Action* ('70). But Los Angeles simply didn't 'get' them. It was time for Alice to go home; to let the Motor City work its magic.

> **"Real, straight-ahead hard rock's in the Detroit DNA somehow."**
>
> **Alice Cooper**

"The first time we went to Detroit was because LA had had enough of us," today's Alice readily admits."They couldn't understand what we were doing because they were all on acid and we were scary. We were a bad trip. It was the same in San Francisco. So we went to the first place that gave us a standing ovation.

"We played the Saugatuck Pop Festival [4–5 July '69], and I'd never heard of The Stooges, MC5 or Ted Nugent and the Amboy Jukes. They weren't national bands, they were local. I saw the MC5 and was like: 'Holy crap, these guys are good.' And not just as players, they were a show band, like a revue, and they were political and really in-your-face. Then The Stooges came on.

"Until then I didn't think I had any competition when it came to outrage. Then I saw Iggy and thought: 'Okay, what's this?' It was the total opposite of what I did. Total punk: no shirt, no shoes, walking on the hands of the audience. I'm going: 'Oh, boy.' The band was basic, but ▷



powerful, just two or three chords. But it didn't matter. It was all about Iggy. Then we went on stage, did the Alice Cooper show and the audience loved it, because we weren't one of those bands that went up there and said: 'Gee, I hope you like us tonight.' We were just like them. We grabbed them by the throat and shook them for an hour and everybody loved it. They said: 'There's a new guy in town.'"

Relocating to Pontiac, Michigan (within easy striking distance of Detroit) the band immersed themselves in the local scene and evolved. Although not entirely by symbiosis.

"Arriving into Detroit," recalls Dunaway, "we're thinking: 'Oh man, the Stooges, the MC5, Mitch Ryder, all these great bands… How are we going to fit into that? We were like… 'Okay, we've gotta up our game here if we're going to follow The Stooges.'"

While the decidedly androgynous, thrift shop-styled Coopers' hitherto baroque strain of freak-out music toughened and simplified under the influence of the bands that they were witnessing and supporting, the exchange of ideas wasn't one-way.

"Our music got stronger," Dunaway continues. "But, by the same token, we land there and overnight the MC5 have sparkly fabrics in their outfits, and Iggy's wearing women's silver gloves, so it was a mutual merging of the arts. That's how art works: you see something you like and you make it your own. But as far as it being successful for us, we got a lot of gigs, but were still living in the raunchiest dive hotel on the outskirts of Detroit."

So what was the secret ingredient that ultimately took the newly Detroit-shaped Alice Cooper from abject poverty to worldwide chart-topping, box office records-breaking superstardom in just three years and four albums? Two words: Bob Ezrin.

"I'd just started working for Nimbus 9 productions in Toronto," Ezrin recalls. "I was Jack Richardson's assistant, and my job was to get rid of Alice Cooper. But after seeing them play Max's Kansas City in New York I was so impressed I told them we'd produce their record. Then I had to come back to the office and explain myself, because I'd been sent to do the exact opposite. In the end I argued so aggressively and energetically that Jack said: 'Enough, already. If you like it so damn much, then you do it.' And that's how I became a producer."

"Let me tell you something about Bob," Alice continues. "Bob was our George Martin and he's my George Martin. He always was. *Love It To Death* [their defining, Detroit-recorded third album, released in 1971, Ezrin and the band's first collaboration] was the first real Alice Cooper album, because Bob got involved and gave us a sound. When we first got together with Bob he said: 'You hear a Doors song, you know it's The Doors. When you hear the Stones, same thing. But you guys don't have a signature.' So we worked very hard on making the Alice Cooper sound come alive."

Ezrin (who remains, according to Alice, "the only one who may have a darker sense of humour than I do") succeeded in forging the band's floundering sound into a swaggering, hard-edged, garage gothic, Grand-Guignol glam-rock tumult.

Confidently evolving from *I'm Eighteen* to *Elected*, via *Under My Wheels* and *School's Out*, this Ezrin-assisted Cooper sound rapidly captivated – and outraged – the global mainstream. And while clearly born of a shared vision, it was also a product of its time and place: 1970 Detroit. More specifically, producer and band hunkered down in a barn that overlooked an insane asylum, cross-pollinating macabre psych-informed surrealism with theatrical vision, informed by Stooges, MC5, local radio, heavy industry, radical politics, riots, soul and rock'n'roll. Alice Cooper owes an enormous debt to Detroit. And it's payback time.

"He's the man." Alice inducts producer Bob Ezrin into the Canadian Music Hall Of Fame in 2004.

"We couldn't record a Detroit album without the original guys."

Producer Bob Ezrin

The first seeds of *Detroit Stories* (Alice Cooper's twenty-first and latest album) were sown on 2003's *The Eyes Of Alice Cooper* with *Detroit City*, a stand-out song that name-checked Iggy Pop, Ted Nugent, *Creem* magazine, Bob Seger, Eminem, Kid Rock and the MC5 (whose guitarist Wayne Kramer guested). Sixteen years later the song was reprised as the lead track of *The Breadcrumbs* EP, essentially a six-track dry run for the album that *Detroit Stories* became. Four of its tracks (covers of Bob Seger's *East Side Story* and the MC5's *Sister Anne*, Wayne Kramer co-write *Go Man Go* and *Detroit City* itself) have even been revived for *Detroit Stories*, while Alice's version of Suzi Quatro's *Your Mama Won't Like Me* and the Mitch Ryder-styled medley of Shorty Long's *Devil With A Blue Dress On* and J.J. Barnes's *Chains Of Love* (with Motor City stalwart Mick Collins on backing vocals) remain EP exclusives. Essential ones, at that.

Yet rather than exorcise any desire to pay fitting tribute to the city that provided a crucible for both of their subsequent careers, the EP's half-dozen tasty *Breadcrumbs* merely served to whet Cooper and Ezrin's appetite for more. Detroit's cultural legacy is vast, there's much to celebrate, and, as Ezrin freely admits, they both feel they owe the city an awful lot.

"We chose to do *Detroit Stories* this time around because the Alice Cooper sound started there. The group became Alice Cooper in Detroit when we started to work together, and it created a career for both of us that's lasted our entire lives and for which we are incredibly thankful. *Detroit Stories* is an homage to the place to which we owe our careers."

Not just the place, but also its people.

As *Detroit Stories* took shape, the pair realised that they were already sitting on exactly the right song to encapsulate the intrinsic Detroit attitude: the succinctly titled *Shut Up And Rock*, an out-take from 2017's *Paranormal*.

"When it came time for the Detroit project," Ezrin recalls, "it was like, well shit, *Shut Up And Rock*'s as Detroit an attitude as we've ever had. It's a straightforward, in-your-face, full-of-energy, blue-collar, hard-working place. They don't want to hear about your Gucci this, or your yoga class that, they just wanna move forward… So shut up and rock."

Opening the record with a cover of the Velvet Underground's *Rock 'N' Roll* might seem incongruous, yet in spite of the Lou Reed composition's long-established association with New York City, even it has got a Detroit story to tell.

"I first heard it in 1971 when we were doing the *Detroit Featuring Mitch Ryder* album," Ezrin remembers. "A lot of the songs were covers, because Mitch wasn't really a writer. So we decided to work it up. Steve Hunter, who had just joined the band, was still very uncertain of his role, kind of shy and retiring, but he came up with a riff that knocked everyone's socks off. That ignited the song and made it one of the album's stand-outs.

"When it came time to do *Detroit Stories*, we were talking about what Detroit meant to us, and one of the main things that was going on while we were working there was the city's amazing radio. There was so much rock'n'roll on the air, so we felt it was really important to set the stage by acknowledging that it was Detroit radio that turned a hard, monochromatic, dark place into something multi-coloured, full of possibility and energy that inspired us to be who we were."

Today's Alice, meanwhile, saw distinct possibilities in the song that its original incarnation never quite captured: "The Velvet Underground's *Rock 'N' Roll* had that New York heroin chic thing going on, with the lyrics kind of thrown away. So we listened to the song, and thought why don't we take it to Detroit, put a V8 engine into it and turn it into a really rocking rock'n'roll song? And so we got Steve Hunter, Joe Bonamassa and [Detroit Wheels' drummer] Johnny 'Bee' [Badanjek] on it, and they turned it into a whole different song." ▷

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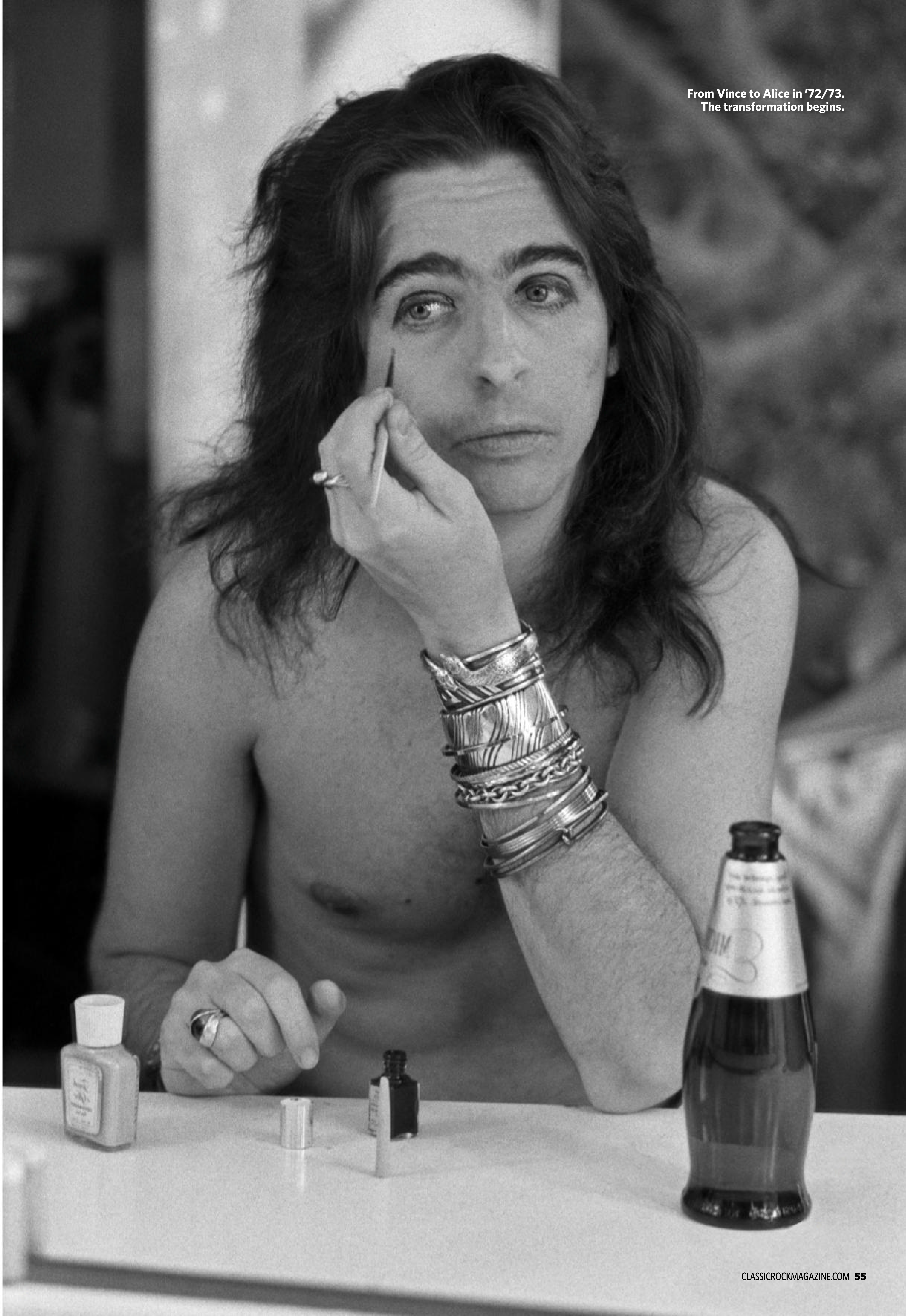


From Vince to Alice in '72/73. The transformation begins.

TERRY O'NEILL/ICONIC IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

The original Alice Cooper band in 1971: (l-r) Michael Bruce, Dennis Dunaway, Alice Cooper, Glen Buxton, Neal Smith.

What better way to put a Detroit spin on to proceedings than by utilising the talents of some of the city's more iconic musicians? And *Detroit Stories* is positively packed with prime examples of the very best.

Scoping around for the ideal core rhythm section, Alice and Ezrin approached their old friend Johnny 'Bee' (who, aside from his work with the Detroit Wheels, appeared on Cooper's 'solo' debut *Welcome To My Nightmare*, and has performed alongside such luminaries as Edgar Winter, Bob Seger and Nils Lofgren). Badanjek suggested they contact jazz-literate bassist Paul Randolph, hot young local guitarist, Garret Bielaniec ("The guitar backbone of the record," according to Ezrin), and Parliament/Funkadelic's Amp Fiddler (although the latter ultimately couldn't make the final sessions, leaving Tommy Denander, James Shelton and Ezrin to handle any occasional keyboards).

Detroit Stories is also favoured with guest appearances from some bona fide members of Michigan rock royalty. Grand Funk Railroad's Mark Farner adds six-stringed support to a newly refreshed *Detroit City, East Side Story* (a Bob Seger composition that dates back to 1966), the hi-octane punkoid blur of *Go Man Go* and a rip-snorting, all-out assault on *Sister Anne* that also features Wayne Kramer. In many ways the heart and soul of the Motor City's music scene, Kramer's soul-searing, D-defining guitar licks are all over the record, serving to accentuate just how much of the MC5's influence remains in the enduring Alice Cooper oeuvre.

Other Detroit legends were approached with a view to making guest appearances on the record – Iggy Pop, Suzi Quatro, Ted Nugent and Bob Seger included – but, with a narrow recording window due to Alice's invariably packed schedule ("It's insane," says Ezrin, "he's the hardest-working man in showbusiness") simple logistics got in their way.

But while Detroit is (as Paul Stanley willingly attests in an iconic Kiss anthem – co-written with none other than Bob Ezrin) a Rock City, it's also the home of Tamla Motown, and of countless illustrious electric bluesmen from John Lee Hooker to Andre Williams, so *Detroit Stories* sees Alice venturing into occasionally unexpected musical terrain.

"I wrote *$1000 High Heel Shoes* to be kind of R&B," says Alice, "but never thought it would end up being so R&B. Then we just looked at it and said we're in Motown, so let's give a nod to Motown. So we used the Motor City Horns, and Sister Sledge (technically Philadelphia's own, but very much forged in the spirit of Motown) on backing vocals, and it turned into a total R&B song. Normally I'd have said absolutely not, but on this album I went: 'Absolutely yes, this song needs to be on here because you can't ignore Motown, you're in Motown.'"

Another Cooper/Ezrin/Kramer co-write, *$1000 High Heel Shoes* is the funk-fuelled tale of a humble Uber driver's unquenchable fetish for bank-breaking designer stilettos that grooves irresistibly to Johnny Badanjek's insistent backbeat, Paul Randolph's loping bass and the smoothly deployed R&B chops of Kramer and Bielaniec's intertwining guitars. It's very Motown, irrefutably funky, yet totally Alice Cooper.

"I think a lot of people might balk at that song a little bit," Alice continues, "and go: 'That's not Alice Cooper.'"

But it's not as if Alice hasn't surprised us before. Long-time listeners will remember such

"Glen passing away was the stake in the heart of the original band. He was our Keith Richards."

Alice Cooper

MAIN: GETTY; JENNY RISHER/PRESS

distinctly off-piste AC favourites as *Blue Turk, Crazy Little Child* and *Teenage Lament '74* (the latter featuring a veritable tabernacle choir of backing vocalists that included Ronnie Spector, Labelle, The Pointer Sisters and Liza Minelli). So when *Drunk And In Love* turns out to be a blues-based excursion with Joe Bonamassa on lead guitar and Alice blowing a mean harp, no one's got any real excuse to be particularly shocked.

An unlikely collision of biting social commentary and coal-black gallows humour, *Drunk And In Love* addresses the darker side of Detroit's recent history; the proliferation of homelessness in the wake of the City's declaration of bankruptcy in 2013 and its long-term human cost. The song's central protagonist is a homeless alcoholic endeavouring to embark on a perilous romance: *'Come into my cardboard box and out of the storm/You can mend my socks while I keep you warm'*.

"This guy knows his situation," explains Alice. "He knows that he's living under a bridge, and there's a girl who lives there too and he's inviting her into his box. It's like: 'We're both here, we both like to drink, let's do this together.'"

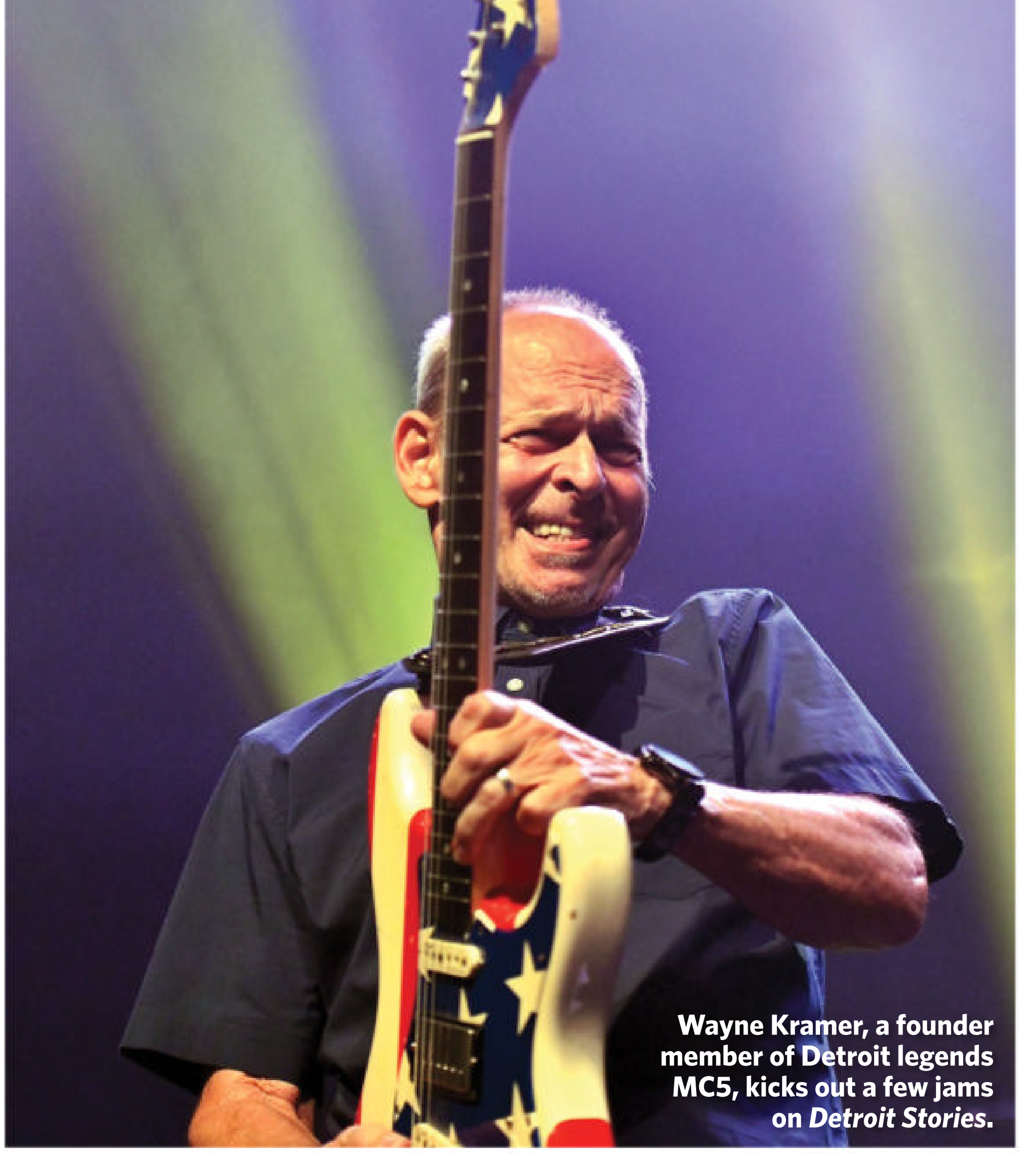
Essentially it's a boy-meets-girl song, but one that comes with a couple of stings in its tail: *'Just call me Ripple and I'll call you Rose,'* its unflinching lyric continues, *'we can cuddle on the pavement where my buddy froze.'* It's dark stuff, and based in uncomfortably familiar territory. Anyone who has dealt with the spectre of alcohol dependency can only consider the words of *Drunk And In Love*'s narrator and reflect: 'There but for the grace of God go I.'

"Oh yeah, that was me." Alice freely admits. "Thirty-seven years ago that's where I was headed."

For hard-core Alice Cooper fans, *Detroit Stories*' headline is that it finds the four surviving original members of the Alice Cooper group back in harness, writing and recording again. This time out Cooper, Dunaway, Bruce and Smith combine their resources on two songs, the first of which, *Social Debris* stampedes out of the traps in vintage style: Michael Bruce's riff bolstered by both Rick Tedesco and Tommy Henriksen's guitars; Smith's hammer of the Platinum God drums entirely titanic; Dunaway cheekily reprising *Elected*'s opening bass flourish.

It's Alice Cooper in excelsis.

"That song could have been on *Love It To Death* or *Killer*," reckons Alice. "We started it at my house in Phoenix, but when you get in the studio with the original band, it gets a little more dangerous. It has its own personality. It doesn't sound like the stuff recorded with the other guys, it's *the* Alice Cooper sound, especially when you put Bob Ezrin at the helm."



Wayne Kramer, a founder member of Detroit legends MC5, kicks out a few jams on *Detroit Stories*.

"Their music was a little too aggressive for the West Coast, they couldn't find a home until they came to Detroit."

Wayne Kramer

When reconvening the original Alice Cooper group to record a song that could have been included on 1971's *Killer*, the dream scenario is to record it exactly as it would have been recorded for *Killer*. But, as Ezrin admits, there'll always be a missing piece. "I wanted Glen Buxton to play lead on that song, and he wasn't available."

And for very good reason. Original Alice Cooper guitarist Buxton died of viral pneumonia in 1997. He was just 49. So how do you replace the irreplaceable?

London-based guitar-playing singer-songwriter Steven Crayn is an Alice Cooper fan. And a Bob Ezrin fan (which came as something of a surprise to Bob when they hooked up on social media: "I didn't even know I had fans," Ezrin deadpans, "but I apparently have one"). When Crayn shared photos with Ezrin that the producer himself had never seen before, it became increasingly apparent that he wasn't just a fan, but a super-fan. And as an Alice Cooper super-fan who played guitar, it followed that he'd probably learned to play by jamming along with Glen Buxton's *Killer* solos, ergo Steven Crayn was exactly the man for the job.

Whether this supposition constitutes entirely logical joined-up thinking or not, Ezrin explained his plan to Alice and the pair decided to give it a shot.

"So Bob called him," Alice recalls, "and said: 'Listen, can you play like Glen Buxton?' And he goes: 'Yeah.'" (Like he was ever going to say anything else.) "So he actually played on it."

"He was over the moon," Ezrin continues. "And he gave me some real time and effort. He went into a studio, tried out a few things, and I sent him back to the drawing board a few times, but in the end he managed to capture that original Alice Cooper energy and sound. So when you listen to *Social Debris* you can easily imagine it having been recorded in 1971."

The second outing for the original Alice Cooper band on *Detroit Stories* marks something of a first: rock'n'roll as relationship counselling.

"We couldn't record a Detroit album without the original guys," Ezrin explains, "because some of the stories we're telling on the album are our own. *I Hate You* is one such song, and it's probably the most personal, non-allegorical story on the whole album."

I Hate You's first four verses feature successive lead-vocal performances from each member of the band tearing into another of their number with no holds barred. *'I hate you and your stupid bass'*, Neal Smith rails at his brother-in-law Dennis Dunaway, before Mike Bruce lashes back at Smith: *'I hate you and your spinning sticks, your platform boots and your insane chicks.'* A chorus follows with the entire quartet bellowing the song's uncompromising title, prior to Dennis – either the bravest combatant or possibly the oldest friend clutching the shortest straw – hitting out at Alice with: *'I hate you, your spider eyes/A guillotine? Oh, big surprise.'* Then The Coop himself, up last but no less vicious, takes Mike down with the bitchy: *'I hate you and that guitar pout/Those tired riffs we all laugh about.'*

It's hard-core family therapy, but also a comedy roast. Everybody's kidding. No, really.

"It's very truthful," says Ezrin, who's been closer to the band and its members for longer than almost anyone. "In the sense that they all aired their grievances with each other in a very loving, open-hearted comical way."

"When most bands break up they hate each other," says Alice. "They never talk again and only have bad things to say about each other. But our band didn't divorce, it separated. Everybody did their own projects and it splintered. ▷

Paul Randolph plays bass on some tracks on *Detroit Stories*.

WAYNE KRAMER: GETTY; PAUL RANDOLPH: NICOLO LANFRANCHI/LAIF / CAMERA PRESS

We never had bad blood, no lawsuits, nothing. And then Glen died. Glen passing away was the stake in the heart of the original band. He was our Keith Richards, and it just wouldn't sound the same without him."

As *I Hate You* approaches its close, the entire band turn their fury on the heartbreakingly absent Buxton for a poignant final verse: *'We hate you, we hate your sneer/The cigarettes, the smell of beer… But most all we're filled with rage/At the empty space you left on stage.'*

"That was really heartfelt," Alice says of the stand-out song's touching emotional twist. "All of us really do miss Glen."

"They all shared the laugh," Ezrin reveals. "But then they all came together and told the most fundamental truth about the Alice Cooper group as it is now, that there is a hole on stage. And because Glen gave himself away, in a way [the smoking, the drinking, the 'unapologetic life' that's also referred to in *I Hate You*'s final verse], they're angry with him. They love him so much, and they still talk about him all the time."

Without Buxton, might it ever be possible for Ezrin to record a new Alice Cooper album that's comprised exclusively of material written and performed by the four originals, perhaps with Tommy Henriksen or even Wayne Kramer deputising on lead guitar?

"Could it happen? I think it could," Ezrin speculates. "Would it happen? I think that there are issues outside of my sphere of influence that would have to be resolved. But I'd love to see a project like that at some point. There isn't a discussion to that effect going on right at this moment, but it has been floated from time to time, so I wouldn't be surprised if someone called me up and said we really want to do this. And if they did, I'd be in."

"Oh yeah," concludes Alice, the someone who might some day finally decide to make such a call. "Anything's possible."

While nostalgic fans might pine for the reanimation of Alice Cooper the group (the lost five-piece entity that soundtracked disaffected adolescence – *I'm Eighteen, School's Out* – way better than any preceding band apart from The Who), Alice Cooper the man, and the artist, has always striven to maintain his relevance. To tweak the Cooper brand in line with rock's progress, to move with the times and, counter-revolutionary or not, to remain commercial.

Hence the inclusion on *Detroit Stories* of a decidedly Cooper-ized cover of contemporary Detroit alt.rockers Outrageous Cherry's earworm-tastic *Our Love Will Change The World*, which is, in the best hook-laden way possible, both saleable and as catchy as all hell.

"We've never been afraid of being commercial," Ezrin admits, "as long as it's on our own terms. When we first came across Outrageous Cherry, we were attracted by the name. They sounded like our kind of band. Then when we listened to the song, we thought: 'This is insanely good, but it's not Alice Cooper.' We needed to change the arrangement, make the lyrics, sound and attitude more Cooper-esque while maintaining the spirit of the disaffected GenZennial who's saying: 'Get out of the way, this is our world. You may not like it now, but you'll get used to it.'"

Ezrin's ability to recognise what is and what isn't 'Alice Cooper' lies at the heart of the couple's enduring working relationship, for the creature that is Alice Cooper was originally crafted, constructed, and continues to be maintained, by twin Dr Frankensteins in tandem.

"Bob and I are the only two that really know Alice," says Cooper. "When we're writing or listening back to a song, we may look at each other and go: 'Alice would never say that.' We look at Alice in a third person: 'Listen to the way he sings this, Alice wouldn't sing it that way.' And that's how we treat Alice. Bob's the only one I would trust in the world to do that with me, because we both created the Alice character.

"When most bands break up they hate each other. We never had bad blood."

Alice Cooper

Even when I'm doing albums with other producers, I run the songs past Bob. He sends me back a list of comments, and I take notes, then I fix whatever's wrong before going to the other producer."

Detroit Stories was in a large part constructed under covid restrictions that lay heavily on proceedings and slowed down progress. Routine travel between studio locations became either impractical or impossible as the pandemic took hold.

"There were a lot of complications caused by covid," Ezrin says. "But in a way I like the fact that it forced us to stretch."

Hanging On By A Thread (Don't Give Up), the album's climactic closer, directly addresses its fraught times.

"There's an element of gallows humour in everything we do with Alice Cooper," Ezrin continues. "The only place we didn't indulge it was on *Hanging On By A Thread*. It was originally conceived as an anti-suicide song. There was a sharp rise in the number of people taking their own lives in Detroit during very difficult years for this city economically, socially and culturally – and not just in Detroit but all over the place. So we thought that maybe one of our Detroit stories might be useful to the world if we admitted that even we are hanging on by a thread and they're not alone. Their feelings of desperation, fear and hopelessness are shared by so many people and the important thing is to not step off the ledge, but to reach out to someone and talk. That's why we have the suicide hotline number at the end. Then along came covid."

"When the pandemic hit," says Alice, "Bob and I realised that all we had to do was change the second verse and *Hanging On By A Thread* could also apply to the pandemic. Let's give the audience a break and say 'Let's quit being victims and let's attack this thing. We're the human race and it's going to go down before we do. Let's punch the bully in the nose.'"

"When Alice had written and recorded that second verse, I listened to it and it stopped me in my tracks," says Ezrin. "I played it to my wife and said: 'Listen to this! Doesn't this capture the way we're feeling?' So we finished an updated version of *Hanging On By A Thread* directly addressing the covid crisis, called *Don't Give Up*. I'm really proud of Alice on that one. He's such a great lyricist and highly underrated."

So what's next for the temporarily grounded, highly underrated, hardest-working man in show-business? With a shot of vaccine in his imminent future, Alice Cooper (still bafflingly limber and age-defyingly sprightly at 73) is aching to get back on the road.

"I can't wait to tour," he says. "We're already working on the next Alice Cooper album and the next Hollywood Vampires album, with Johnny Depp and Joe Perry, we've already got tons of songs for that, so we've two tours coming up and hopefully two more albums."

With the singing half of the Cooper/Ezrin partnership's eyes set firmly on the horizon, the producing half further reflects on the couple's unlikely, if fateful, shared Detroit genesis.

"My biggest blessing of all," Ezrin concludes, "was having my boss Jack Richardson not want to produce Alice Cooper and throwing me under the bus. And instead of being crushed by the bus I got on it and rode into a career. The whole experience of being in Detroit at that time was fantastic. The people within its music community were rivals, but friendly rivals. There was a lot of cross-pollination, a lot of attention being paid from one artist to another and each thinking: 'Oh crap, I've got to do better.'

"So the scene became self-nourishing and self-cultivating as the rest of the world remained unaware. Then suddenly all these bands just erupted and became globally important. Having the original band on *Detroit Stories* rounded out our Detroit story. We knew we had to do that. Our experiences in Detroit were informed by certain fixtures, and one of those was that every time we walked out of that barn, where we worked on *Love It To Death*, we were looking across at a mental hospital. And while we were very much aware of it, we weren't entirely sure which one was really the mental hospital: the building at the end of the field, or the barn itself."

Bob and Alice: still crazy after all these years.

Detroit Stories is out now via EarMusic.

JENNY RISHER/PRESS

JENNY RISHER/PRESS

"Bob [Ezrin] and I are the only two that really know Alice. We look at Alice in the third person."

Alice Cooper

TWO GUITARISTS WALK INTO A BAR...

...and before you know it they've recorded an album together. It's easier when they've both got form, of course, as Iron Maiden's **Adrian Smith** and the Winery Dogs' **Richie Kotzen** have.

Interview: **Dave Ling** Portrait: **John McMurtrie**

On paper the two guitarists are markedly different. Best-known mainly for two spells cranking out metal riffs with Iron Maiden, Londoner Adrian Smith has also played with ASaP (Adrian Smith And Project), Psycho Motel and, more recently, Primal Rock Rebellion. Born on the other side of the Atlantic and 13 years younger, Richie Kotzen started out as a shredder, then hooked up with Poison and Mr. Big. Now he alternates between a solo career and as a member of the Winery Dogs.

And yet there are commonalities. Both are gifted songwriters and musicians, quietly spoken, residents of California, and share a passion for bluesy, funk-fuelled hard rock. And they were both on the line when we picked up the phone and made a conference call.

How and when did the two of you first become acquainted?
Adrian Smith: We first met eight or nine years ago but became friends over the last couple. I've a house in LA, and during the time spent there we often have jam sessions. Richie came over one night and we ripped it up on some Stevie Ray [Vaughan] and Bad Company, and had so much fun we decided to try writing some songs.

When did it become obvious that you should make a record?
Richie Kotzen: It was a slow thing, and we threw the idea around for a while. The first song was *Running*, and from there hit upon the idea of trading vocals. It all came together organically. There was no deadline, and maybe that's why the record has a real honesty.

Did one of you write the music and the other the lyrics?
Smith: No. We both play guitar. And although Richie's more experienced at singing than me – to say the least; he's got *way* more range – I've sung all my life. Richie handles a few of the choruses because they're quite high, and I tended to do the verses. In fact our voices are quite similar tonally.
Kotzen: Listening back, there are times when I don't know who's doing what – is that me, or Adrian? But it's cool that we are so connected.

How did you decide who plays the solos?
Smith: We divvied those up the same way – it was just a case of whatever felt right.

Richie, in the press-release biography you say that you were "haunted" by the lost-love-themed song *I Wanna Stay*.
Kotzen: It was nuts. I got that one stuck in my head and it kept coming back like a recurring dream, but in the end it turned out really nice.

Who played the long, intoxicating solo at the end of that track?
Smith: That was me.

Did you enjoy the freedom of being able to stretch out?
Smith: Yeah. And it can be a very dangerous thing. Put two guitarists together in a studio… [laughter from both]. The album contains a lot of fireworks, but we tried to keep the solos relevant to the songs.

You also share the bass parts, with Tal Bergman (Billy Idol, LL Cool J, Rod Stewart, Chaka Khan) and Richie playing drums on all but one of the tracks.
Smith: We are the rhythm section on most of the album. We laid down the drums as a guide in most places, but they were so good that we kept them.
Kotzen: The drums provide the foundation of the house. And I have a long history with Tal Bergman. It's not like we were opposed to involving others, but you can get into a meditation-style method of recording.

> **"The album contains a lot of fireworks, but we tried to keep the solos relevant to the songs."**
> **Adrian Smith**

Iron Maiden's Nicko McBrain contributes the pounding yet funky drums on the track *Solar Fire*.
Smith: Nick had played with the Pat Travers Band, among other bands, so it was perfect for him.
Kotzen: Nicko really fired things up.

The album was recorded on the Turks & Caicos Islands in the Bahamas. It's a tough old life, eh?
Smith: Well someone's got to do it, and we were happy to step up. I'd been there before, of course.

When Iron Maiden recorded three albums there during the 1980s.
Smith: Yeah. Back then there were lots of distractions. Five guys on a desert island. We had our own seats at some of the clubs. It was different this time, there were no shenanigans.

Amazingly, you somehow kept it all secret.
Smith: Richie and I are pretty laid back, we're not all over town telling our secrets. It wasn't difficult.

If it was put to you that the music has a vibe of the classic Hughes/Thrall album from 1982 about it, would you agree with that?
Smith: I take that as a massive compliment. I love that album. It's such a shame that they never went on and made another record.
Kotzen: I'm ashamed to admit I've never heard that album. But Glenn Hughes was a big influence on my vocal style.

Presumably your bandmates in Maiden and the Winery Dogs have now heard the album?
Kotzen: Billy Sheehan [bassist] sent a nice text after the video for the first single, *Taking My Chances*.
Smith: It's the same with me. I had a couple of congratulatory emails from some of the Maiden guys who liked *Taking My Chances*, but nobody's heard the whole album.

Will *Smith/Kotzen* be a one-off?
Smith: We're already thinking about song ideas [for a follow-up], and of course we'd like to play some live shows, though whether or not that will happen is uncertain.

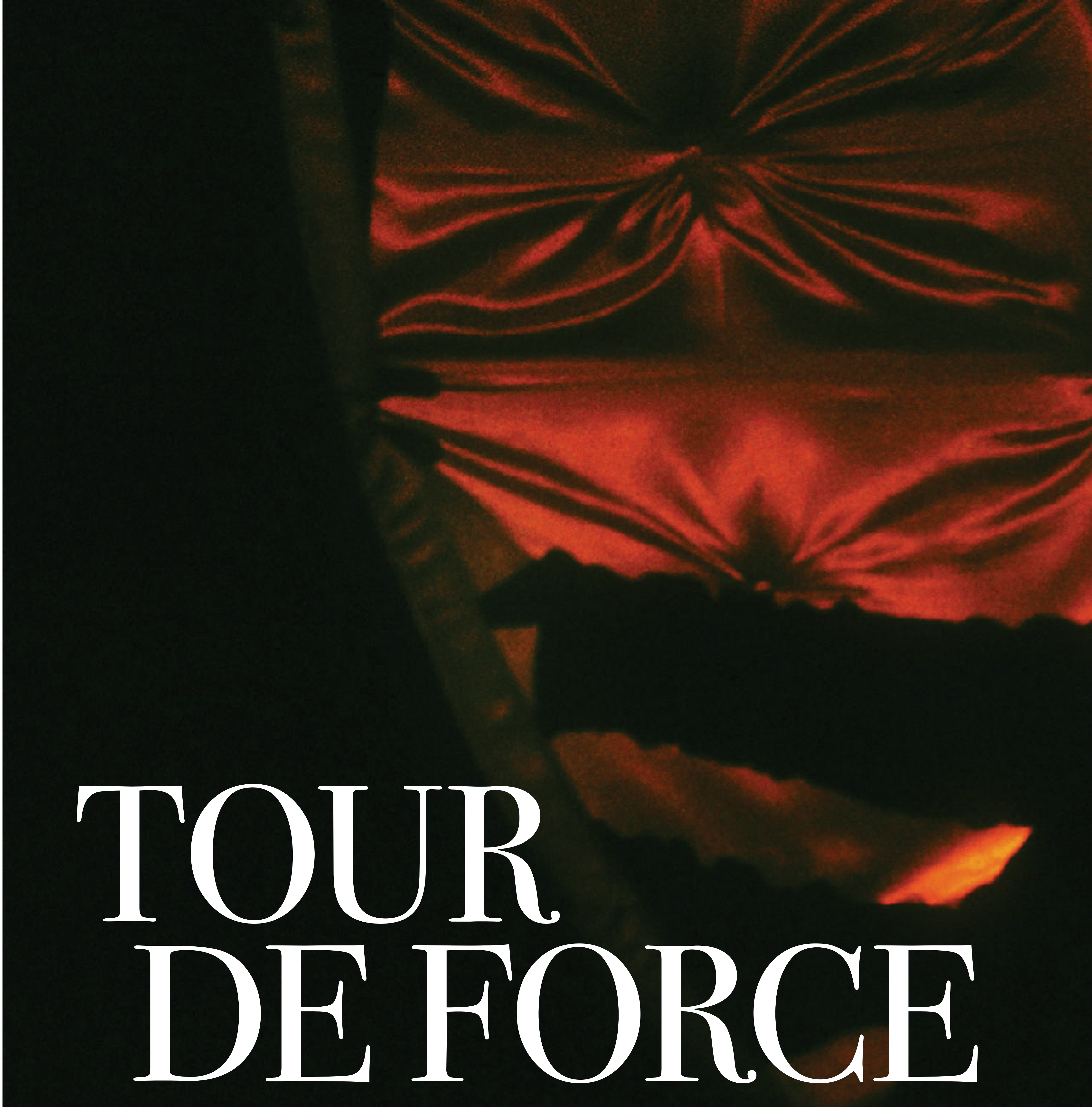
What does 2021 hold for you, Richie?
Kotzen: Who the hell knows? I had a year of shows booked on four continents for my album *50 For 50*, and bam! I'm just thankful that everyone I love is in one piece.

Adrian, Maiden have prepared some material for the follow-up album to *The Book Of Souls*.
Smith: We've shows booked [this summer], but whether or not they'll happen nobody knows.

Will you wait until lockdown ends to push on with a new Maiden album?
Smith: Playing live will happen first. We can't wait for the green light.

Smith/Kotzen is out on March 26 via BMG.

Playing away from home: Richie Kotzen (left) and Adrian Smith.



GETTY

TOUR DE FORCE

There had been big-production tours before, of course, but **Kate Bush**'s The Tour Of Life was something else. Her first ever tour, it was a breathtaking, groundbreaking combination of music, dance, theatre and more. It was also her last.

Words: **Dave Everley**

Kate Bush has long cornered the market in reclusive, media-averse mystique. But it wasn't always that way. On April 3, 1979, early evening TV news program *Nationwide* dedicated a show to the 20-year-old singer. The event on which the 25-minute special was hung was the opening night of Bush's first – and to date only – tour. "Most live artists make their mistakes either in private or in front of a very small audience," intoned *Nationwide*'s moustachioed reporter. "Tonight, Kate Bush starts at the top, in front of several thousand. She can't afford to fail."

But then in '79 Bush was big news. Her star had been arcing across the firmament ever since she first appeared on *Top Of The Pops* just over a year earlier. That memorable performance of her first single, *Wuthering Heights*, had introduced her as an utterly new and fresh talent. There had been an instant clamour for her to play live. It would be 14 months before she did.

Looking at *Nationwide* all these years later, it's amazing how much unguarded access she granted the programme makers during a six-month build-up. Footage of early production meetings where people are crammed on to chairs and sofas in a tiny dressing room is followed by a clip of a leotard-and-leggings-clad Bush being worked hard by choreographer Anthony Van Laast during an

Reluctant star: Bush in June 1979.

initial three weeks of "gruelling exertion" just to prepare her for several weeks of even more intense choreography.

Remarkably, the camera was allowed into Wood Wharf Studio in Greenwich, South London, where she was drilling her eight-piece band through *Kite* and *Wow*. Here it's possible to get a real sense of the pub gigs she'd started out playing just a couple of years before ("I think the main reason they listen to me is because I'm paying their wages," she says of the rest of the band, her girlish, sing-song voice cut with a chewy South London vocal).

> **"Kate was never at ease in the public eye. She was very reserved, very wary."**
>
> **Brian Southall**

Towards the end of the film, after a brief post-gig chat with an exhausted but exhilarated Bush at Liverpool Empire, the camera cuts back to an earlier interview. Sitting with her back to a studio mixing desk, she puts on a 'posh' interview voice as she answers a string of questions. At one point the off-screen interviewer asks, given that she's achieved so much so swiftly, what has she got left to achieve?

"Everything – I haven't really begun yet," she says, offering a glimpse of the maturity and self-awareness that have always driven her. "I've begun on one level, but that's all gone now, so you begin again."

She would "begin again" many times over during the ensuing years, but never would she do it on stage. She didn't retire entirely from live performances – there would be the odd one-off here and there throughout the 80s – but never again would she put herself through such an exhilarating, ground-breaking, draining experience as her 1979 tour. Until 2014.

When Kate Bush announced that she would be performing 15 dates (later bumped up to 22 shows) at London's Hammersmith Apollo throughout August and September that year, under the banner Before The Dawn, the reaction was one of shock and awe. Shock that she was finally following up that original tour, a promise she'd made many times but all but her most optimistic fans had long given up hope on her ever keeping. And awe at the prospect of what a woman who broke so much ground could deliver with 35 years of artistic and technological advancements at her disposal.

But there was also a question of just how she could follow up the original spectacle, retrospectively dubbed The Tour Of Life, an extravaganza that has grown to almost mythical status. Which is a strange state of affairs given that it was seen by more than 100,000 people at the time. Footage of an hour or so of the show is freely available to view on YouTube, highlighting a performance that bridged the worlds of music, dance, theatre and art. But there's even more footage that has never been made public,including that of the magician Simon Drake, who played seven different characters during the show.

But in many other respects the tour was utterly grounded in reality. Bush spent six months beforehand working herself to the bone as she attempted to forge a brand new model of what a live show could be, then another two months doing the same as she took it around Britain and Europe. It was also hit by tragedy, when lighting engineer Bill Duffield was killed in an accident after a warm-up show, his death almost bringing the whole juggernaut to a halt before it had even started.

But all that was in the future when the idea for the tour was conceived. Ironically, Bush herself was the first to admit that there was no need for her to do it. "There's no pressure," she said in 1979. "But I do feel that I owe people a chance to see me in the flesh. It's the only opportunity they have without media obstruction."

"Kate was never at ease in the public eye," says Brian Southall, who was Artist Development at Bush's record label, EMI, and had worked with her since she was signed. "Whether that was performing on *Top Of The Pops* or doing interviews. She was very reserved, very wary, I think by nature shy. So this spotlight on her was new."

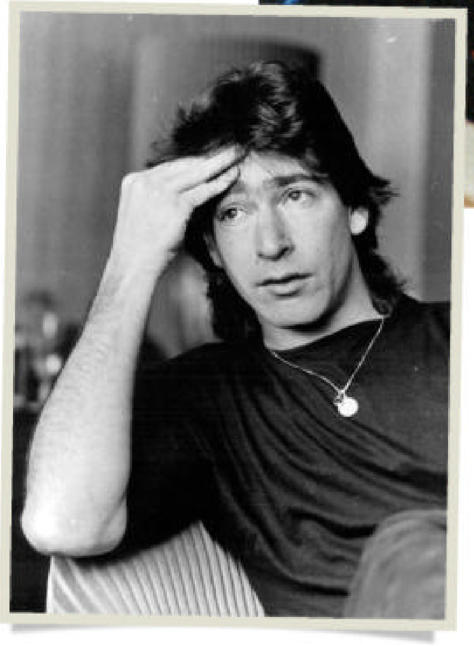
Bush was fully aware that anything she did would have to raise the bar on everything that had gone before. But even then, she was trying to manage expectations, not least her own. "If you look at it, it's my reputation," she said 1979. "And yes, I hope that it'll be something special."

GETTY

EMI were unsure what the show would involve, so the costs were reportedly split between the label and Bush herself. In return they got an artist who threw everything into her biggest endeavour so far.

"She was very determined about how her music was presented and performed. That was pretty obvious from her first album," says Southall. "So no one saw any reason to step in and stop it. The rock'n'roll story was that you put singles out, you put albums out, you went on *Top Of The Pops*, you toured. But she wasn't prepared to do the conventional thing."

In fact no one realised just how unconventional it would be. With its choreography, dancers, props, multiple costume changes, poetry and in-house magician, there was no precedent to which it could be compared.



Rehearsals began in late 1978. Bush had already trained with experimental dancer/mime artist Lindsay Kemp, one-time mentor of David Bowie. But this tour would entail a new level of aptitude entirely, and the stamina to simultaneously dance and sing for more than two hours every night.

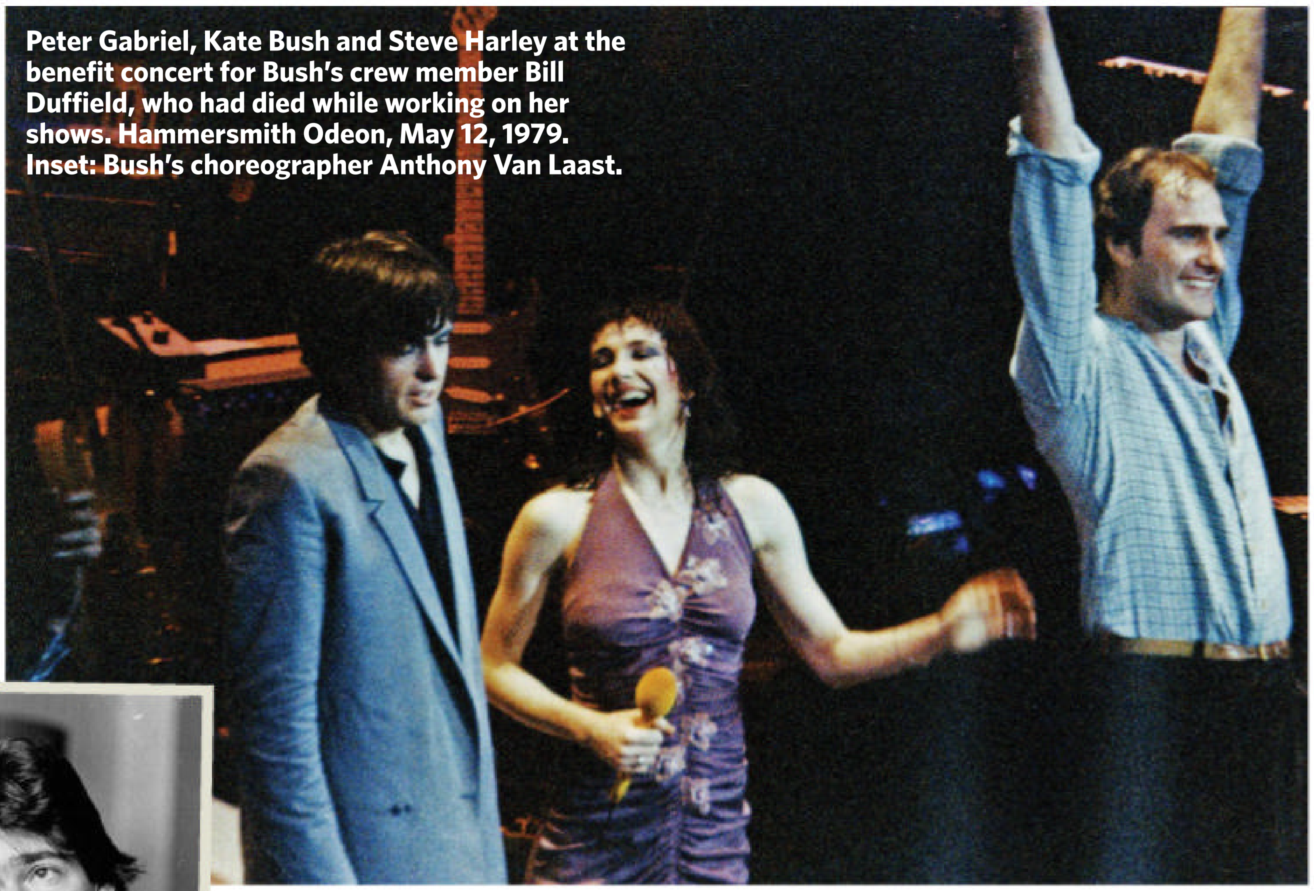
Dance teacher Anthony Van Laast was brought in from the London School Of Contemporary Dance to choreograph the shows and help hone Bush's abilities. Van Laast brought with him two protégés, dancers Stewart Avon Arnold and Gary Hurst. Van Laast put the singer through the equivalent of boot camp at The Place studio in Euston, working with her for two hours each morning. Bush's own input was crucial to the developing routines.

"Kate knew what she wanted, she had very specific ideas," Stewart Avon Arnold says today. "What she wanted was in her head, and she wanted people around her who could help her put it into movement. She had so many hats on at that point – artistic, creative, musical."

While the mornings were for the dance aspect of the slowly coalescing show, the afternoons were for the music. As soon as she was done with Van Laast, Bush would make the eight-mile journey to Wood Wharf Studio in Greenwich, South London, where she would meet up with a band that included Del Palmer, guitarists Brian Bath and Alan Murphy and her multi-instrumentalist brother Paddy Bush. Also present was her other brother, John Carder Bush, who would perform poetry (and whose wife would provide vegetarian food for the tour). It was hard work for everyone involved, and as the shows neared, Bush would work 14 hours a day, six days a week.

"You have to make things more obvious so people can hear them," she said of the live versions of her songs. "Maybe make them faster."

While Bush was utterly in command, sometimes necessity was the mother of invention. With her literally throwing her whole body into her performance, holding a traditional mic would be difficult. So a mic that could be worn around the head was devised.



Peter Gabriel, Kate Bush and Steve Harley at the benefit concert for Bush's crew member Bill Duffield, who had died while working on her shows. Hammersmith Odeon, May 12, 1979. Inset: Bush's choreographer Anthony Van Laast.

"I wanted to be able to move around, dance and use my hands," she said. "The sound engineer came up with the idea of adapting a coat hanger. He opened it out and put it into the shape. That was the prototype."

In early spring 1979, the various creative wings finally came together at Shepperton film studios. There was the odd stumbling block. Del Palmer, Bush's bassist and boyfriend, was less than impressed with some aspects of the choreography when he first saw it.

"In those days, dance wasn't as popular as it is now, and I don't think Del was clear on what we were doing," says Stewart Avon Arnold. "There was a bit where we picked Kate up. I remember him going: 'What they hell are they doing to Kate?! They're holding her between the legs!'"

In late March, a week before the tour was due to start, the whole production moved to the Rainbow Theatre in Finsbury Park, North London, for dress rehearsals. Like everything over the past six months, the whole endeavour was undertaken in secrecy.

"I saw our show as not just people on stage playing the music, but as a complete experience."

Kate Bush

"It's like a present that shouldn't be unwrapped until everyone is there," Bush reasoned. "It's like hearing about a film – everybody tells you it's amazing, and you could end up disappointed. You shouldn't get people's expectations up like that."

By the time the first date of the tour, on April 3 in Liverpool, everyone was drilled to within an inch of their existence. If Bush was nervous, she wasn't letting on.

"There was no suggestion that Kate was scared about going on the road," says Brian Southall. "I certainly never got a sense that she was nervous about the financial aspect of it. If money was her concern, she'd have been out making albums every year rather than every ten years. It's not something that crossed her mind. The creativity was all-important."

Still, to iron out any potential last-minute problems, a low-key warm up show had been arranged at Poole Arts Centre in Dorset. It was there that tragedy struck.

Lighting director Bill Duffield was an integral part of the production. A 21-year-old boy wonder who had worked with Peter Gabriel and Steve Harley, he shared the same forward-thinking mind-set as Bush.

The circumstances of what happened in Poole remain unclear. Some reports said that Duffield fell from the lighting rig while helping to clear the stage away following the show, others said he fell 20 feet through a hole in the stage. Either way, Duffield sustained serious injuries that resulted in his death a week later.

"People were concerned for his wellbeing," says Brian Southall, who met up with the Bush entourage in Liverpool the following night. "They were wondering how he was and if and when he would recover. Sadly he didn't. I think the real shock came when his death was announced."

Twenty-four hours later, with the *Nationwide* TV cameras posted outside the Liverpool Empire, Kate Bush's first tour got properly under way under a cloud – albeit one the public weren't aware of.

While the build up had been intense, the show itself was a magnificent release. Theatrically divided into three acts, the 24-song set included songs from her first two albums *The Kick Inside* and *Lionheart*, plus the as-yet-unheard *Egypt* and *Violin*. But that was where any similarity with a standard rock show began and ended. On an ever-shifting stage of which only a central ramp was the sole constant physical element, Bush was a human conductor's baton leading the entire show. As the scenery shifted and changed through the opening *Moving*, *Room For The Life* and *Them Heavy People*, so did the costumes – and the atmosphere. ▷

GETTY x2

The long return: Kate Bush at one of her Before The Dawn shows at London's Eventim Apollo, August 26, 2014.

"I saw our show as not just people on stage playing the music, but as a complete experience," she later explained. "A lot of people would say: 'Pooah!' but for me that's what it was. Like a play."

Indeed it was – or perhaps several plays in one. For *Egypt*, she emerged dressed as a seductive Cleopatra. For *Strange Phenomena* she was a magician in top hat and tails, dancing with a pair of spacemen. *Hammer Horror* replicated the video shot for the single, with a black-clad Bush dancing with a sinister, black-masked figure behind her. *Oh England My Lionheart* cast her as a World War II pilot.

Like every actor, she was surrounded by a cast of strong supporting characters. As well as dancers Stewart Avon Arnold and Gary Hurst, several songs featured magician Simon Drake, who performed his signature 'floating cane' trick during *L'Amour Looks Something Like You*. And then there was her brother, John Carder Bush, who recited his own poetry before *The Kick Inside*, *Symphony In Blue* (fused with elements of experimental composer Erik Satie's *Gymnopédie 1*) and the inevitable encore *Wuthering Heights*.

But at the heart of it all was Bush, whirling and waving, reaching for the sky one moment, swooping to the floor the next. Occasionally she looked like she was concentrating on what was coming next. More often she looked lost in the moment.

"When I perform, that's just something that happens in me," she later said. "It just takes over, you know. It's like suddenly feeling that you've leapt into another structure, almost like another person, and you just do it."

Brian Southall was in the audience at the Liverpool Empire show. Despite the fact he worked for EMI, he had no idea what to expect. "You just sat in the audience and went: 'Wow'. It was extraordinary. Bands didn't take a dancer on stage, they didn't take a magician on stage, even Queen at their most lavish or Floyd at their most extravagant. They might have used tricks and props in videos, but not other people on stage.

"That was the most interesting thing about it – her handing it over to other people, who became the focus of attention. That's something that never bothered Kate – that 'I will be on stage all the time and you will only see me'. It was like a concept album, except it was a concept show."

Two and a quarter hours later, this 'concept show' was done and the real world intruded once again. If there was any sense of celebration afterwards, then the main attraction was keeping it to herself.

"I remember sitting in the bar after the show at Liverpool and Kate wasn't there," says Southall. "She was with Del. She wasn't an extrovert off stage. There were two people. There was that person you saw on stage, in that extraordinary performance, and then off stage there was this fairly shy, reserved person."

Her reluctance to indulge in the usual rock'n'roll behaviour was both characteristic and understandable. It was a draining performance, night after night as the tour continued around Britain and then into Europe. It was hard work for everyone involved.

"We went out, but not exceptionally," says Stewart Avon Arnold. "We weren't out raving until seven o'clock in the morning on heroin. There's no way we could have done the show the next day."

"When I perform, that's just something that happens in me. It just takes over."

Kate Bush

They occasionally found time to let their hair down. The Scottish *Sunday Mail* reported that certain members of the touring party indulged in a water-and-pillow fight at a hotel in Glasgow, causing a reported £1,000 damage. EMI allegedly agreed to foot the bill, although they stressed that the singer wasn't present during this PG-rated display of on-the-road carnage.

After 10 shows in mainland Europe, the tour returned to London for three climactic dates at Hammersmith Odeon between May 12 and 14. The second of these shows was arranged as tribute to the late Bill Duffield. Bush and her band were joined on stage by Peter Gabriel and Steve Harley, both of whom had worked with Duffield. Gabriel and Harley tackled various Bush songs (*Them Heavy People*, a renamed *The Woman With the Child In Her Eyes*) and played their own songs (Gabriel's *Here Comes The Flood* and *I Don't Remember*, Harley's *Best Years Of Our Lives* and *Come Up And See Me*), before everyone came on stage to perform The Beatles' *Let It Be*.

"Kate asked us all to come and sing with Peter Gabriel and Steve Harley," says Stewart Avon Arnold. "We were on stage, singing chorus with these two icons. And I'm not a singer. It was an emotional night."

Forty-eight hours later, the tour was over. And so was Kate Bush's career as a live artist – at least for another 35 years.

Kate Bush hasn't properly explained why she never took to the road again after that very first tour. Various theories include a fear of flying, the psychic damage inflicted by the death of Bill Duffield, the sheer effort of will and the vast amount of energy that it took to get what was in her head on to the stage. The latter seems most likely, but it could just as easily be a combination of all three. Or none of them.

"I need five months to prepare a show and build up my strength for it, and in those five months I can't be writing new songs and I can't be promoting the album," she once said, the closest approximation to a reason she has ever offered. "The problem is time… and money."

Not that there wasn't a call for it, especially overseas. America was one of the few countries where she didn't sell records, and the idea was proposed that she play a show at New York's prestigious Radio City Music Hall so that her US label, Capitol, could bring all the important media and retail contacts to the show to see what the fuss was about. "She's not a great flier," says Southall. "And she wouldn't do it."

Even more tantalising was an offer to support Fleetwood Mac in the US in late '79. A high-profile slot opening for one of the most successful bands in the world was an open goal for most artists. But Bush wasn't most artists.

"Like most support acts, she was going to get half an hour, with no dancers, no magicians, just going up there with four musicians and banging out a couple of hits," says Southall. "And she wasn't prepared to do that."

Not that she has ever ruled it out. In fact, in all of the increasingly infrequent interviews she has given since then, she's been asked when she would next tour. The answer has always been a charmingly vague tease that, sure, it could happen if the circumstances were right. She once floated the idea that she would write a concept album specifically to base a stage show around (it never materialised). At one point she was rumoured to be working with *Muppets* creator Jim Henson on a new idea. In 1990 she even announced that she would be playing live the following year (that never materialised either).

Then in 2014, out of the blue, she finally delivered on that promise – although, tellingly, for a residency at one venue, rather than a tour.

Fans travelled from around the world to see Before The Dawn, with details of what to expect kept under wraps until the event itself (it proved to be a great success, drawing widespread acclaim). The only certainty was that it wouldn't be a by-numbers live show. And it wasn't, but that is another story…

"She's an innovator," says Stewart Avon Arnold. "She did things that had never been done before. She was the first one in this country to merge creative rock music with creative dance. She didn't have a genre. She had a mentality."

SHUTTERSTOCK

Kate Bush at The Carre Theatre, Amsterdam during her The Tour Of Life tour, April 29, 1979.

GETTY

Taylor Made

Had it not been for guitarist **Dick Taylor**, the Rolling Stones and The Pretty Things might never have happened, and the British R&B scene of 60s would have been much greyer – and quieter.

Interview: **Ian Fortnam** Photo: **Kevin Nixon**

In 1962, guitarist Dick Taylor formed Little Boy Blue And The Blues Boys with Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. Upon bringing in Brian Jones the band changed their name to the Rolling Stones, and Taylor switched to bass. Five months later, he swapped the Stones for art school, where he founded The Pretty Things with vocalist Phil May.

In December 2018, having metamorphosed from the bad boys of R&B into respected elder statesmen, via creating *SF Sorrow*, the world's first rock opera, The Pretty Things played their final live show, at London's Indigo O2. After completing the recording of a stripped-back Pretty Things acoustic blues collection titled *Bare As Bone, Bright As Blood*, May tragically died in May last year. Taylor's future remains unwritten, but "seventy-seven is nowhere near as old as it used to be, so watch this space", he says.

When you started Little Boy Blue And The Blue Boys there was clearly no expectation of a sustainable career, only a devotion to rhythm and blues. Are you still an evangelist for the blues?
It's something I love, but I've always liked lots of stuff. When I was at school the class was divided into tribes according to what music you loved, and I always thought why have an argument about trad jazz versus modern jazz versus folk versus blues versus rock'n'roll, why not just take it all in?

Committing to the Rolling Stones would have meant committing to being a bass player.
That was definitely one of the factors behind me leaving. And it's funny, because when I play the bass now I love it. People moved around bands a lot in those days. Every time Mick, Keith and I went to see Alexis Korner at The Ealing Club the line-up would change. After The Beatles, the idea of a band as an entity rather than just a singer's backing band became far more prevalent, and that's when line-ups started solidifying.

It's often said that after you left the Stones, Phil May 'convinced' you to form a new band. Did you take much convincing?
Phil was at Sidcup Art School, and in the summer before I started at the Central School of Art he really nagged me to start a new band. When I got to

Dick Taylor (left) and Phil May with The Pretty Things in London in 2009.

Central I met Bryan Morrison, who was President of the Student's Union. We became friendly, and he said: "Maybe your band should come and do one of the art school dances." So we did. And he became the Pretty Things' manager.

Was there ever any intention for The Pretty Things to become the bad boys of rock'n'roll?
No. We behaved as we behaved. I don't think we were in the top echelon of bad behaviour particularly, but our appearance and the publicity attendant on our appearance meant it all fell into place whether we liked it or not. Then again, Phil was like a man possessed on stage, and we had [drummer] Viv Prince.

Viv was a bit of a handful, by all accounts.
The final straw with Viv came at The Twisted Wheel in Manchester. He refused to play because the pub across the road wouldn't serve him. What he hadn't twigged was that it was attached to the hotel he'd been in the night before, causing mayhem with The Kinks. In the end Phil said: "You'd better just go home." He was a wonderful drummer, but…

The Pretty Things' story could have been very different if in 1965 you'd gone to America instead of New Zealand.
We all could have been dead a lot earlier, or not lasted the course. The really gratifying thing about our career was how appreciation for the band increased over the last couple of decades. If we'd gone to America and had our fifteen minutes of fame we might have sunk into obscurity and not enjoyed the status we finished up with.

The Abbey Road of 1968, where you recorded *SF Sorrow*, appears to have been an amazing working environment. The Beatles were there making the White Album, and Pink Floyd making *A Saucerful Of Secrets*. How do you remember the sessions?
It was a wonderful place to be. We were rubbing shoulders with amazing people. We weren't all gathered together in one spot, but we'd occasionally bump into each other at the terrible coffee machine.

You left The Pretty Things after all of the various promotions for *SF Sorrow* were completed. How did you come into the orbit of Hawkwind?
[Record company exec] Andrew Lauder took me to see them play. They weren't the most fantastic musicians, but the crowd loved it, so I was captured by their enthusiasm and the fact that it was so off-the-wall.

I'd imagine half the battle with producing the first Hawkwind album was translating what they were doing live into the studio.
After recording *Hurry On Sundown*, Andrew said: "Why don't we just record them live." And that's what we did for the rest of the album, because it was like drawing teeth trying to do it the conventional way. So we just literally stuck the PA up, mic'd it and away we went. I gigged with them for a couple of weeks, which was an interesting experience. One night Dave [Brock] said: "Sod this, I'm going off busking. I can make more money."

Pretty boys: Dick Taylor (left) and Phil May.

> "[The Pretty Things] behaved as we behaved. I don't think we were in the top echelon of bad behaviour particularly."

The last electric Pretty Things show, at Indigo, was never meant to mark the end of your work with Phil. You always planned to carry on playing acoustically. So *Bare As Bone, Bright As Blood* was meant to mark a new beginning rather than a conclusion.
Yes, exactly. The electric band finishing was largely due to Phil's health.

The world really rediscovered The Pretty Things only in recent years. It must have been heartbreaking having to call a halt to the electric shows when you did?
It was very difficult. But it became obvious that Phil was finding it very difficult. We'd looked at ways of trying to alleviate the stress of travelling for him, but in the end we thought that rather than struggle on it'd be better to just draw a line under it.

At those final gigs Phil was still able to carry his indisposition well, there was no suggestion he was under any kind of stress.
That's the amazing thing. The very last thing Phil did was when we guested with Arthur Brown. Beforehand he was going: "I don't know if I'm going to be able to do this", and his breathing was really bad – he had COPD [a lung condition] and emphysema in the end – but when he got on stage he'd just radiate.

Can there be a Pretty Things without Phil?
I don't think so. But we'll see what happens with this album.

Do you still hear from the blokes out of Little Boy Blue And The Blue Boys?
Messages have been passed, but not really. I met up with Keith and Ronnie when they played the Isle of Wight. That was the last time… Anyway, good luck to them.

***Bare As Bone, Bright As Blood* is available now via *Madfish*.**

18+

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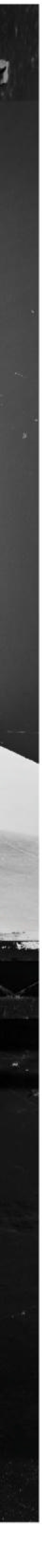

"IT'S ONLY ROCK'N'ROLL, ISN'T IT?"

While acknowledging the bigger picture, it's no wonder **Thunder** are frustrated at not being able to tour their latest album – seeing as it's one of the best records they've made in decades.

Words: **Neil Jeffries**

The hitherto smoothly cropped Danny Bowes is growing his hair again. Although he insists it's only because, like the rest of us in lockdown, he has no choice. In the nicest possible way, the man staring out of my screen via Zoom shows none of the debonair style we've come to associate with the Thunder frontman. Don't tell her, but he blames his wife. "If I leave it to get longer I look like a homeless guy," he says, "so I let her cut it. Now I look like a fucking convict!"

But, ever the optimist, he's confident he'll have got out of jail whenever the band eventually tour to promote their new, thirteenth studio album *All The Right Noises*. It's poised to continue the band's purple patch of consecutive Top-10 UK chart placings begun with 2015's *Wonder Days* – a revelation recorded after a six-year hiatus and in the shadow of second guitarist Ben Matthews's successful battle with cancer. Powerful follow-up *Rip It Up* (2017) boldly refused to sound like it. And on *Please Remain Seated* (2019) the music was different again – Thunder deconstructing a collection of their own songs and re-imagining them in fresh, mostly acoustic arrangements. But Bowes recalls that exercise as "a real head-fuck" that not everyone appreciated.

"A lot of people said: 'Oh, that's it then, is it? Just sit-down stuff from now on? Bad back?'" he recalls. "I won't name names, but there were some members of the band who were a bit wounded by those comments. It made us all the more determined when we did this one to come back with a really good rock record to prove we weren't ready for our pipe and slippers quite yet."

All The Right Noises is a hard rock tour de force that effortlessly kicks those slippers a long way down the road with 11 songs written and produced by guitarist Luke Morley. The point was emphasised last November when the five-piece – completed by bassist Chris Childs and drummer Harry James – posted a pre-release video for its full-on opener *Last One Out Turn Off The Lights*.

"That was always going to be the first track on the album," a beaming Bowes says proudly, "from the moment Luke played us the demo. It was such a statement of intent."

Talking to *Classic Rock* separately five days later, Luke Morley is proud of it too: "Some people have said it sounds like *Whole Lotta Love*, but I didn't see that. For me it's more like *Fire* by the Jimi Hendrix Experience – so I got away with that! The band said the intro reminds them of Deep Purple. I was hearing *Rough Boys* by Pete Townshend… You've got to be who you are. If I can get in all the best bits of the music we listened to as kids and still make it our own, then that's the game."

> **"We weren't ready for our pipe and slippers quite yet."**
>
> **Danny Bowes**

For their fourth consecutive album since beginning their third spell together in 2014, the band recorded at Monmouth's legendary Rockfield Studios, as used by Black Sabbath, Queen, Rush, Oasis et al. "The people who run it are mental," Bowes says, laughing. "The documentary [*Rockfield: The Studio On The Farm* – check it out on YouTube] only shows half of it! But we get on and they're nice people to work with. We've worked in other studios which are state-of-the-art, but you're frightened to put your feet up. We like things to be a bit grubby, have a bit of history."

The album was completed in January 2020, the mix was done by Mike Fraser in Vancouver in March, and with an arena tour announced the band were all ready to go. Then… well, you know what happened next.

They did reconvene at Rockfield in July, after restrictions were lifted, to re-record eight of the new songs live for the two-CD version of the album. The second disc actually begins with four of the "also-rans", as Bowes calls them, that didn't make the 11, followed by eight that did, tracked live with backing vocalists Julie McGuire (aka The Duchess in *Space Elevator*), Carly Green, and Sam Tanner who also played keyboards.

"An eight-piece band performing in the studio!" says Bowes. "For three days we recorded it song by song until we'd got the best take, then went on to the next one – bang-bang-bang. That was the last time we were all in the same room together.

"It's been very frustrating waiting to let people hear this, but when you think about what's going on in the world – people suffering, losing their lives…. It's only rock'n'roll, isn't it?"

Morley echoes Bowes's enthusiasm for the expanded range of vocal textures boosting his own backing vocals. "I do like harmonies – I've always been a massive fan of the Beach Boys and The Beatles. As I wrote these songs I kept hearing them. They feel like the icing on the cake. There aren't many hard rock bands that do it. It adds another element to the sound. We'll definitely take extra singers with us when we tour this, because they're such a part of the album it would be weird not to."

Even more prevalent on the album is a tone of anger, for which Morley is unapologetic: "You ▷

Thunder cloud: Harry James chooses the wrong day to give up smoking.

can't write about chasing girls all your life! I'm getting a bit old for that."

"On every album there's always been some form of social commentary," Bowes continues. "*Distant Thunder, Low Life In High Places, It Happened In This Town*…But, yeah, I was surprised by the sheer number of angry songs."

"I didn't realise how angry I was," Morley says with a chuckle. "Obviously there was the Brexit thing: *Last One Out Turn Off The Lights* is my utter frustration at that debacle – four or five years of not being looked after by the government, people promoting those old kinds of racial stereotypes."

As in the song *St George's Day*?

"Yes. It feels like we've gone backwards. I don't even remember it being this bad in the 'seventies. I find that deeply sad. Dreadful. The thing about Europe, particularly, I found baffling. Well, I know how it happened – people like [Nigel] Farage were whipping up that terrible sense of fear and xenophobia. And there was Trump…"

"I didn't realise how angry I was."
Luke Morley

Morley is pointing to *Force Of Nature*, which Bowes recognises as one of "two songs that you could level at the orange buffoon, as I call him… Luke wrote it first-person, trying to be inside his mind. I wouldn't say I tried to channel the buffoon – the song is hard enough anyway, technically – but the lyrics do. The other is *The Smoking Gun*, a warning about the popularism raging around the world and the way social media has fuelled that fire by giving people the 'truths' they want to read. These are things Luke cares about."

Cares about but doesn't hector, as Morley explains: "If you're writing songs, you can't just rant. There has to be some kind of sense of poetry and musicality to it. And also humour."

That humour (as well as a couple of songs about girls) is on the album too. Laughter has sustained Bowes and Morley since they first met at school nearly 50 years ago and is never far away when they talk. They're not quite Morecambe & Wise but, like the album title – for those who remember the legendary sketch in which Eric grabs classical conductor Andre Previn by the lapels and through gritted teeth insists: "I'm playing all the right notes, but not necessarily in the right order" – sometimes it comes close.

Bowes points out, though, that *All The Right Noises* is a line lifted from the album's second track, *Destruction*, a deadly serious song about mental health, dementia, depression. "Once again… big riffs, a big rock tune, but written about a serious subject. Every time he sends me a demo I want him to surprise me. And the fact he can still do it – with a song like that – after all these years and all these albums is a revelation. When he nails it and he blows my hair back, it's an amazing feeling. He's my mate, he writes these tunes, and he can still surprise me. That's a biggie."

As for the title, Bowes says the Morecambe & Wise thing is a happy accident he's happy to take because he's a big fan of the late comedy kings. "Their comedy looks so effortless and made up, but it was so well rehearsed. We've always tried to do that too. We haven't always got away with it, but we've tried to."

The title inspired a Google search for "bizarre musical instruments", which led to The Singing Ringing Tree – a three-metre-high wind-powered sound sculpture that sits on a hill above Burnley. It's made out of galvanised steel tubes, each tuned to resonate a different note. A photo of it provides a striking front cover for *All The Right Noises.*

"As soon as I saw it, I thought it looked like something Storm Thorgerson and Aubrey Powell of Hipgnosis would use," says Morley. "We'd done a couple of album sleeves with Storm and I liked him a lot. I loved the idea that this thing sits on top of a hill overlooking Burnley, like an alien that had landed there and sat just watching over the town – but making music when the wind blows through it. Very English!"

Morley and photographer Jason Joyce duly drove north in July, and Joyce took photos at various times of the day and night. They later settled on one taken at 3am as the sun was coming up. "They said it was absolutely freezing," says Bowes. "Luke sent me video footage of him and Jason all wrapped up with little head-torches on."

The colours are natural, not Photoshopped. It's an amazing image and a fitting one for what could be the band's best album yet. And of course that was always the intention, with the whole band working as hard as they could, applying the same commitment they always have, only now with the added benefit of experience.

"There's no reason why you can't get better as you get older, insists Morley. "I've met so many people over the years who've said to me: 'Ah, but you're never going to make an album as good as [the band's debut] *Backstreet Symphony*.' I find that really depressing. Because although I think *Backstreet Symphony* was fantastic at the time, you can't stand still. You've got to move forwards. This new one is better. It's completely different and totally mature. Like any other kind of art or craft, people who are committed to it do it until they drop, because you are learning all the time."

All The Right Noises is out on March 12 via BMG.

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LILLIE EIGER/PRESS

In our experience there's little that can't be remedied – at least to some degree – by rock'n'roll. Not always the same rock'n'roll, of course. Different days, times and situations call for different shades of the stuff. With that in mind we aim to make the *Classic Rock* Hot List an eclectic banquet of rock; an elite buffet, if you will, of the new tracks you need in your life.

So what's on the menu this month? Well, we've got classic riffage from The Treatment, the disco-primed newbie from Royal Blood, Eureka Machines man Chris Catalyst joining forces with Neil Gaiman (yes really – and it's kinda brilliant), stadium-ready rock from Steve Lukather's son, politically charged funk from New Orleans live legends… and way more besides. Plus most of these bands have albums or EPs in the pipeline, so if you like what you hear on these pages you can find plenty more where it came from.

Check out more tips, and vote for your favourite every Monday, at loudersound.com with *Classic Rock*'s Tracks Of The Week.

Royal Blood *Typhoons*

They first wowed us back in 2014, as the blues-rocking duo who made a full band with just bass, drums and enthusiasm. From there everything blew up, as they released singles that were too heavy for radio – and then got played on the radio, a *lot*. Now Brighton's prodigal sons (aka Mike Kerr and Ben Thatcher) are stoking the fires of anticipation for their new album with this strutting, boot-stomping groove. Hip-shaking, heavy and sassy as hell, it's so addictive it can't possibly be good for you. If Josh Homme and Muse got stuck in a disco together, they'd have come up with something like this. Now tell us that doesn't sound fun.

Find out more at *royalbloodband.com/typhoons*

Levara
Automatic

Conceived in the hospitality room at a Foreigner gig they were opening for, *Automatic* is Levara's first real statement of intent – and it's a big one. A smart, soaring marriage of driving guitars, a chorus the size of Brazil and contemporary production, it stirs their collective roots (guitarist Trev Lukather's dad is Toto legend Steve Lukather, drummer Josh Devine was One Direction's live drummer) into one hooky anthem, with sensibilities to reach young and older generations alike.

Find out more at *levaramusic.com*

Chris Catalyst (feat. Neil Gaiman)
Make Good Art

On May 17, 2012, author Neil Gaiman gave the commencement speech at the University Of The Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The transcript of the speech went on to become a book, the video has been watched more than a million times, and Gaiman's 'Make Good Art' advice inspired a generation of creative hopefuls. That spirit lives on in this commanding, slightly Stone Roses-y first taste of Chris Catalyst's new solo album *Kaleidoscopes*, using Gaiman's speech as its inspiration (and Gaiman's voice as its backbone).

Find out more at eurekamachines.com/new

Skinny Knowledge
Keep Me Out Of It

You might not know them yet but, trust us, you'll like this. The brainchild of Bournemouth four-piece Skinny Knowledge, *Keep Me Out Of It* pops out at you with the sort of no-brainer chorus seldom heard since the halcyon days of Green Day and Sum 41 (and regardless of how 'cool' that whole vibe is/isn't right now, we all like it, let's be honest). Tight, bouncy and ballsy, it's a spirited antidote to testing times. You'll be singing along to the chorus before you can say 'Fat Lip'.

Find out more at *skinnyknowledge.co.uk*

LEVARA: NIKKI MATA/PRESS; CHRIS CATALYST: NEIL CHAPMAN/PRESS; SKINNY KNOWLEDGE: MARIANNE HARRIS/PRESS

Greta Van Fleet

Age Of Machine

Smalltown Michigan boys with big ideas and ambitions, Greta Van Fleet have reached cinematic new heights with *Age Of Machine* – taken from their forthcoming album *The Battle At Garden's Gate*. Rich and layered, it clocks in at just under seven minutes and comes with a hearty serving of classic-rock mystique, and yet it has a grandiose presence of its own too; swerving and soaring with a maturity that, once again, belies the band's tender years.

Find out more at
facebook.com/gretavanfleet

L.A. Witch

Motorcycle Boy

Motorcycles and rock'n'roll have enjoyed a long, happy relationship, which this Californian trio are continuing in style on this moreish, heady new spiral of grunge, indie and psychedelia. Their name and healthy wooze quota might scream "Black Sabbath fangirls" (and there is a streak of Sabbath in *Motorcycle Boy*), but there's also just as much in the way of the cool, post-punk purr of the Gun Club at work – plus a dash of Crippled Black Phoenix-y darkness.

Find out more at
lawitches.bandcamp.com

GRETA VAN FLEET: © ALYSSE GAFKJEN/PRESS

This Or That?

White Void frontman Lars Are Nedland takes on the most intimidating quiz known to man.

Beatles or Stones?
Beatles.
AC/DC or Led Zeppelin?
Led Zeppelin – a thousand times.
Hendrix or Page?
[Thinks…] Page.
Green or Clapton?
Slowhand.
Sixties or seventies music?
It's a hard one. The most important stuff started in the sixties, but just the way it was refined in the seventies I think… Yeah, I've got to go with seventies.
Gibson or Fender?
Fender.
Van Halen or Guns N' Roses?
Guns N' Roses.
Stadium or sweaty club?
Sweaty club.
Cigarettes or alcohol?
Alcohol. Don't smoke, never did.
Fine wine or cold beer?
Cold beer.
Love or money?
Love. Jesus, of course!
Tour bus or plane?
Just for the feeling of touring, a bus is great. We had a really long drive from Bucharest in Romania up through the Carpathians, to a festival site up the mountains in a very old town. That drive was one of the most amazing trips.
Cardio or weights?
Cardio. I'm a runner, I'm a ten-kilometre guy. I always bring my running shoes on tour, so I've run basically every big city in Europe!
Book or movie?
Book. I just recently read *The Stranger* again, by Albert Camus, and that's as amazing as I remembered it.
Stallone or Schwarzenegger?
Schwarzenegger.
Prog or punk?
I'd have to go with prog; my favourite album of all time is *Red* by King Crimson.
Metallica or Megadeth?
Metallica, but only up to *…And Justice For All*.
Horror or comedy?
Horror. All-time favourite? Probably *The Exorcist*.
Early bird or night owl?
Night owl, for sure.
Plant-based or plant-averse?
Plant-based.
Cats or dogs?
Cats.

WHITE VOID: JØRN VEBERG/PRESS

White Void *Do. Not. Sleep.*

With band members coming from black metal, chiptune [*electronic music inspired by videogame music and sounds – Genre Ed*], avant-garde metal, pop and blues backgrounds, Norway's White Void have a diverse musical palette at their disposal. Somehow they arrived at this sharp, suave cocktail of 70s occult rock and Ghost-esque flamboyance. The cherry on new album *Anti* (out on March 12 via Nuclear Blast), the up-tempo *Do. Not. Sleep.* has lyrics rooted in the absurdist philosophy of Albert Camus. "Sure, existence is absurd, but that doesn't have to be a bad thing," frontman Lars Are Nedland says. "That's the good thing about absurdism, it's kind of up to you what you do with that information."
Find out more at *facebook.com/whitevoidofficial*

Sun King Rising
Beneath The Southern Sun

Propelled by some searing, melodious lead guitar, and with a warming piano backbone, *Beneath The Southern Sun* is the brainchild of Texan singer/musician/songwriter John Blangero. Encompassing flavours of blues rock, soul and southern rock, it's our favourite track from the band's new album *Delta Tales*.

"I knew I wanted real horns, real back-up singers, big sounds," says Blangero. "I think people are seeking solace in music during this period. So one of the goals with *Delta Tales* was that we're gonna make people feel good."
Find out more at *sunkingrising.bandcamp.com*

Dumpstaphunk *Justice 2020*

You want funky? Oh, we'll give you funky. We'll give you six long-standing kings of funk (and soul, and rock'n'roll, and R&B…) and this highly toe-tapping taste of their new album, co-starring Chali 2na & Trombone Shorty. It's like Parliament-Funkadelic with politics, with that sort of irresistible 'loose tightness' brought about by years of jamming and craft-honing. Still, from such a revered New Orleans live powerhouse, attracting guest stars such as Carlos Santana and the Grateful Dead's Bob Weir, we'd expect nothing less. Read more about them over there to the right.
***Find out more at* dumpstaphunk.com**

Code Orange *Autumn And Carbine*

Normally this Pittsburgh gang err a little heavily on the metal side for us (though if that's your jam they're among the best on the current scene), but we can't get enough of *Autumn And Carbine*. Hardcore vocals are ditched in favour of melodic ones, as the band make like a heavy Alice In Chains – all thick, dirty swagger, with singer/guitarist Reba Meyers taking the lead to brilliant effect. It's from their album *Underneath*, and you can also find a killer version on their stripped-back 2020 live album *Under The Skin* (think MTV *Unplugged* revisited, haunting and grunge-tastic).
Find out more at *codeorangetoth.com*

Who Are Dumpstaphunk?

They might have been voted 'New Orleans' Best Funk Band' in 2014, but that doesn't mean they don't rock.

Describe your sound in a sentence.
Soulful funk music influenced by sounds from the 60s & 70s with a New Orleans attitude,

Where did you all meet?
In our home town, New Orleans.

Let's talk influences. Who are your go-to guitar and bass heroes as a band?
Larry Graham, George Porter Jr., Leo Nocentelli, Freddie Stone.

And who has the best voice in rock'n'roll?
Robert Plant and Mick Jagger.

What's the defining moment in Dumpstaphunk's life so far?
Opening up for the Rolling Stones at the Superdome in New Orleans.

When gigs can finally take place again, what can people expect from a Dumpstaphunk show?
Same big energy, with some new music!

What can you all do besides music?
We can make a two-hour drive last eight hours.

What's next for Dumpstaphunk?
Our new studio album *Where Do We Go From Here* will be released on April 23 [via Mascot Label Group/ The Funk Garage], and we're hitting the road hard as soon as we can!

DUMPSTAPHUNK: JEFF FARSAI/PRESS

The Treatment *Rat Race*

It's strange to think that these Cambridge rockers have been going since 2008. With every record (and every line-up shift) they manage to seem like relative new kids on the block, albeit with the sort of braggadocio brought by years' of touring with the gleefully unreserved likes of Kiss, Mötley Crüe and Steel Panther. Most importantly, they're still delivering the goods musically, as strutting, go-hard-or-go-home bruiser *Rat Race* shows. The opening track from their upcoming album *Waiting For Good Luck*, it sounds like something Def Leppard and Bon Scott-era AC/DC might have cooked up in some sweatbox of a club somewhere.

Find out more at *facebook.com/TheTreatmentOfficial*

The Deccan Traps
Sun And Moon

When he's not playing as part of the Queen + Adam Lambert line-up, bassist Neil Fairclough cooks up his own tunes with The Deccan Traps. Part ELO glitz, part Thunder with sparkles, *Sun And Moon* makes a killer opening case for them, with a *humongous* chorus that seems to burst out of nowhere. Seriously. It's a kind of magic, you say? Who knows. Either way, if they can nail an album's worth of tracks like this, they'll be laughing.

Find out more at *thedeccantraps.com*

Ayron Jones
And Keep An Ear Out For

A genre-fusing Seattle native with fans in high places, Ayron Jones is a name to watch. One could liken him to a heavier, grungier Gary Clark Jr, but to stop there would be a massive oversight.

You may not know Jones yet, but an impressive mix of A-listers have already registered their approval – fellow Seattleites Duff McKagan and Pearl Jam's Mike McCready are fans, and he's played alongside an eclectic list of bigwigs from Jeff Beck and BB King to Public Enemy and Run DMC. His latest singles (the brooding call-to-arms anthems *Take Me Away* and *Mercy*) offer solid explanation why; you can hear the influence of Stevie Ray Vaughan and Soundgarden in his guitar tones, with a touch of Michael Jackson in his vocals and a hip-hop underbelly running all the way through.

Find out more at ayronjonesmusic.com

AYRON JONES: KAREN MASON-BLAIR/PRESS

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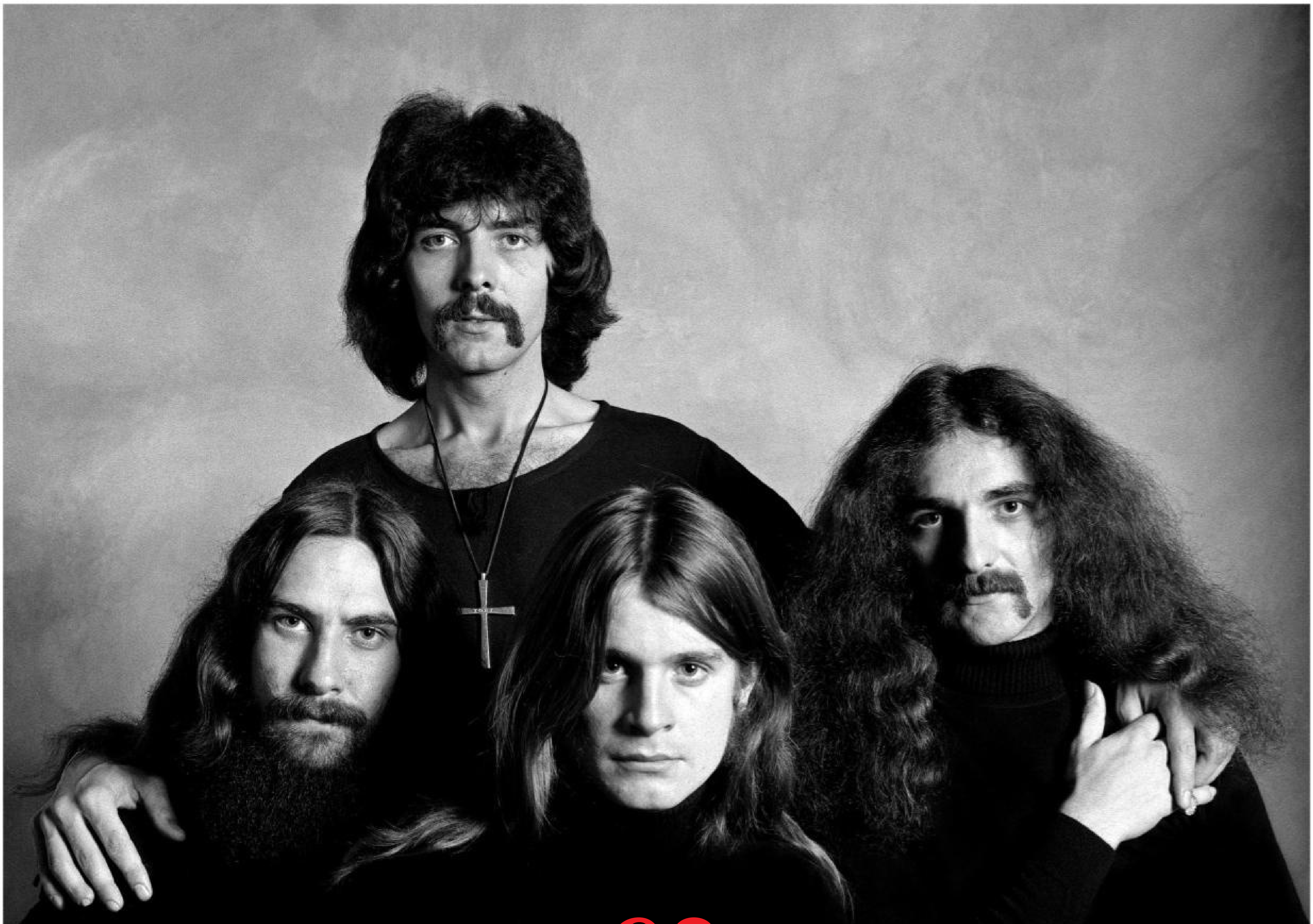

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P92

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Edited By Ian Fortnam
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THE HARD STUFF ALBUMS

JENNY RISHER/PRESS

Alice Cooper

Detroit Stories EARMUSIC

Fifty years since *Love It To Death*, Coop revisits birth city and forges late-life classic.

Spearheaded by *I'm Eighteen*, *Love It To Death* laid glowering templates for hard rock, glam and punk, shot with cinematic thrills, TV-eye narratives and tough Detroit attitude.

Although coming of age in Phoenix before Alice Cooper manifested in LA, the man himself is from the Motor City, its outcast grit in his DNA. After LA proved too laid-back, the emergence of the MC5 and Stooges called Alice back to his self-described "birthplace of angry hard rock".

With Alice transformed into rock's spider-eyed baddie and his band drilled into shape by young producer Bob Ezrin, *Love It To Death* ignited the huge success consolidated by *Killer* and *School's Out*.

After his subsequent decades of turmoil and triumph, Alice returned to Detroit in 2019, celebrating balls-out Motor City rock with Ezrin, MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer, Detroit Wheels drummer Johnny 'Bee' Badanjek, bassist Paul Randolph and others on the *Breadcrumbs* EP, on which originals like *Detroit City 2020* were joined by badass garage covers of Bob Seger's *East Side Story* and MC5's *Sister Anne*.

The EP has now been expanded with the same core squad into Alice's twenty-first solo album. *Detroit Stories* is his most concise bolt of precision-tooled heavy rock in 50 years, enhanced by Ezrin's robust production and Alice on lethal form, vocally and lyric-wise.

Instantly stunning from the opening salvo of Lou Reed's *Rock 'n' Roll*, Mitch Ryder's strutting 1971 version its blueprint, and *Go Man Go* piledriving at getaway-car velocity (opening line: *'I just got outta jail, stole me a hubcap, I'm a moron'*), the street-wise anthems continue with *Hail Mary*'s feral Chuck Berry chug, self-explanatory *Shut Up And Rock* and Motor City roll-call *Detroit City 2021*. Cooper's lyrical flair hot-wires the monolithic *Social Debris* into a glorious anthem of urban collapse. Bitingly relevant wry Detroit nihilism rakes *Independence Dave*, *I Hate You* and *Wonderful World*'s grainy basement chug. *Drunk And In Love* humps Stooges-style gutter blues. *Our Love Will Change The World* oddly evokes jaunty sunshine pop. *$1000 High Heel Shoes* honours Detroit's soul pedigree with backing chorale and Motor City horns garnishing its strutting funky groove. *Hanging On By A Thread (Don't Give Up)* becomes Alice's semi-spoken survival ballad. The *Breadcrumbs* covers provide worthy touchstones.

At 73, Alice has come home to give his home city a new classic to add to its illustrious hard rock legacy.

■■■■■■■■□□

Kris Needs

Walking Papers

The Light Below

CARRY ON MUSIC

Compelling third album from the Seattle blues swingers.

Bassist Duff McKagan and ex-Screaming Trees drummer Barrett Martin had too many day jobs to continue in the Papers, but there is no loss in quality on this album. That's testament to the talent of singer, guitarist and songwriter Jeff Angell, and keyboard player Benjamin Anderson. Credit, also to the new rhythm section of Will Andrews and Dan Spalding.

As before, Walking Papers deliver low-key blues rock that swings with leonine grace, and when Angell sings: *'I've got venom and imagination and I won't let anyone stand in my way'* it stands as a fitting manifesto. His guitar is fluid when soloing, and supportive when Anderson's keyboards seep through to conjure an enticing mixture of menace and sadness.

Highlights include *What Did You Expect?*, the eight-minute *Divine Intervention*, *Stood Up At The Gates Of Heaven*, *Going Nowhere* (with a beautiful saxophone solo from Gregor Lothian) and *Creation Reproduction And Death* that delivers a hint of *Blackstar*-era Bowie. *Money Isn't Everything* begins in quasi-drum'n'bass mode but ends up somewhere else and gives way to the sassy funk of *Rich Man's World*.

■■■■■■■■□□

Neil Jeffries

Acid Mammoth

Caravan HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

More giant, Iommian hits from the cosmic bong.

When it comes to crushing and psychedelic doom metal, Acid Mammoth are operating on a higher plane than most. The Greek quartet's third full-length album deviates not one iota from their long-established blend of pulverising, slow-motion Sabbath worship and syrupy, lysergic menace, but *Caravan* is easily the band's most gripping record to date.

Opener *Berserker* is a perfect kicking open of the doors of perception, with eerie, occult rock vocal phasing and enough bowel-worrying heft to dislodge your ornaments, while *Psychedelic Wasteland* fulfils its titular remit with a ululating barrage of tar-thick fuzz. It's the towering, 11-minute title track that will send stoners scuttling off to their over-packed bongs, however. Both a barbarous pentatonic onslaught and a surging, melancholy howl at the moon, it proudly defies the logic that doom need only be a daisy-chain of knocked-off riffs played at maximum volume. Not, of course, that there's anything wrong with that.

■■■■■■■■□□

Dom Lawson

Saga

Symmetry EARMUSIC

Canadian prog maestros go acoustic deluxe.

The delicate density of Saga's better material doesn't automatically lend itself to an acoustic shakedown, but 43 years after their self-titled debut the band are still discreetly pushing boundaries. Rather than simply strip some of their extensive catalogue (and three new instrumental fillers that needn't detain us) down to the absolute basics, they've embarked on a more considered programme of reinterpretation and rebuilding, with the assistance of a string section. Thus, *Pitchman* swaps its guitar squall section for cascading *Morning Has Broken*-style piano, a fierce cello interlude and subtle harmony vocals. Similarly, *Tired World* keeps its piano introduction and recurring earworm melody, but where there was once a simple but extended guitar riff there's now a whole new level of dramatic tension. Like everything on *Symmetry*, it's the same but different. What in lesser, less-thoughtful hands could have been an anaemic re-treading is now – acoustic or not – more intriguingly complex.

■■■■■■■□□□

John Aizlewood

The Middlenight Men

Issue 1 MIDDLENIGHTMEN.COM

Yo-Yo guitar meets Quo sticks – heavy pop mayhem ensues.

He may have been a sideman for much of his career, but Nick Hughes obviously absorbed a thing or two about songwriting during his time as guitarist with the likes of the Yo-Yos and Love Zombies. This debut from the band he's formed with Status Quo drummer Leon Cave is stuffed full of irrepressible power-pop hooks coated in soaring harmonies and flecks of earthy humour, adding up to something resembling The Cars being cut

up on the dual carriageway by The Wildhearts.

At times the electronic sheen added by the synth-laden production slightly dampens the punkish kick of these tracks, but the breathless vim of tracks like *Budapest Brawler* and *BA Baby* and the crunching glam boogie of *Heroine Heights* still leave colourful bruises.

Johnny Sharp

Downes Braide Association

Halcyon Hymns CHERRY RED

MOR prog project gets dewy-eyed for old England

In classic neo-prog fashion, this duo might be named more like a firm of chartered surveyors than a band, but since 2012 they've made three albums of tidy progressive AOR. This fourth from Yes/Asia keyboard player Geoff Downes and songwriter to the stars Chris Braide is their most ambitious yet.

It's not quite a concept album, but themes of nostalgia for childhood haunts and past romances, not to mention an idyllic lost England, are woven throughout a richly melodic set. Poetic, Radio 4-ish spoken-word monologues punctuate beatific, bittersweet chamber-pop visions like *Warm Summer Sun* and *Beachcombers*, regularly swathed in warm banks of harmonies. A slightly edgier past is hinted at on the 11-minute *Remembrance* when a narrator speaks in posh tones of how "we looked for magic mushrooms on the coastal path", but once again the overarching tone is of a loved-up Larkin – a welcome escape from a pandemic-stricken, politically turbulent real world.

Johnny Sharp

Steve Lukather

I Found The Sun Again

MASCOT LABEL GROUP

The 60s and 70s influence a surprisingly safe record for such dynamic personnel.

Joseph Williams contributes vocals to *Along For The Ride*, on which Jeff Babko channels some *Won't Get Fooled Again*-spec keyboards. Williams also appears on laid-back foot tapper *Run To Me*, with Lukather's All-Starr bandmate Ringo.

Anybody searching for a likeness to Toto will be satisfied with the moody, groovy *Serpent Soul*, but that's about as far as it goes. Instrumental *Journey Through* smacks of Steve Vai's *For the Love Of God* – perfect for the contemplative soul also prone to a bout of air-guitar playing. The title track is serene and melodic but with little else to say for itself.

Prog and blues crop up in the covers of Traffic's *Low Spark Of High Heeled Boys* and Robin Trower's *Bridge Of Sighs*, which closes the record. Along with Joe Walsh's *Welcome To The Club*, none stray far from the originals except for better production.

Quality in spades, but little in the way of surprises.

Phoebe Flys

Mason Hill

Against The Wall

7HZ RECORDINGS

Energetic, classy young hard rockers's debut.

It's taken five years, but finally Glaswegians Mason Hill have an album to their name. And it's been worth the wait.

If you enjoy Gun, Little Angels and Skin, then you'll go a bundle on what these five do. The songs are well constructed, melodic and powerful. Predicated on Scott Taylor's emotive vocal style, and with the quick-fire guitar interplay between James Bird and Marc Montgomery, the band have come up with an album of mostly memorable songs. *No Regret* and *Against The Wall* have the brawn of air-punching anthems, while *Who We Are* shows they can do a power ballad. *Find My Way* betrays the strut and groove of arena rock, and *Hold On* is a slow burner that soon catches fire. One or two tracks, such as *We Pray*, are a little ordinary, but for the most part the album displays an exciting young talent.

Malcolm Dome

Maximo Park

Nature Always Wins

COOKING VINYL

As society crumbles, Newcastle's alt.rock poet laureates find power in the personal.

If there could be such a thing as a bellweather band, of late it's Maximo Park. Once the star-jumping indie pop romantic of the '00s alt.rock set, Paul Smith turned his poetic pen to the political on 2017's *Risk To Exist*, warning of the effects of austerity, Brexit and Trump. Now, reduced to a three-piece for this synthetically enhanced seventh album Maximo portrait a gutted post-EU Britain but, resigned, try to find personal warmth amid the fallout.

'The libraries are closing down… the island's revolted,' Smith intones on the suave, future psych *Child Of The Flatlands*, while *Why Must A Building Burn (…before the powerful learn?)* uses Smith's experience of seeing his old merch guy Nick Alexander among the Bataclan dead to frame a comment on Grenfell and Tory callousness. Yet on defiantly euphoric tracks like *Versions Of You, All Of Me* and *Baby, Sleep*, love and parenthood endure in marvellous modernist fashion; Maximo's Smiths and R.E.M. leanings now come laced with traces of The National, Tame Impala, The Killers and, occasionally, all-out Erasure. If anything will survive 2021, it's Maximo's relevance.

Mark Beaumont

Osibisa

New Dawn MARQUEE

Afro-rockers are still with us after 50 years.

Osibisa are a reminder of the length and endurance of the Black British musical inheritance. Ghanian in origin, they formed in 1969 and have worked on and off as a fluid collective ever since, with keyboard player Robert Bailey now the only original member.

But constant rejuvenation of their line-up has enabled Osibisa to remain fluid and eclectic. *New Dawn* merges a range of styles, from the gruff 70s boogie of *Adjuawa Aye (Go With The Flow)* to the contemporary R&B juicy fruit of *Dark Matter*, featuring R&B vocalist Faye Jones. In between they alight on highlife, Afrobeat, reggae and muscular funk in a casual yet meticulously practised manner that is never less than pleasurable, infectious and colourised.

David Stubbs

ROUND-UP: SLEAZE

By Sleazegrinder

Quintron + Miss Pussycat: a fun and wholesome rock'n'roll riot.

Quintron + Miss Pussycat

Goblin Alert GONER

This New Orleans duo are part weirdo garage-rock ensemble, part performance-art spectacle, and their music is just as out-there. Essentially it's like The Cramps if they were deranged, foul-mouthed kiddie show hosts, and although you can't actually see them sauntering around in paper-mache lobster outfits or manipulating bug-eyed marionettes you can certainly imagine it all happening.

Q and Pussycat are too prolific to even keep up with – a guess is that they've made at least eleventeen albums – but this highly accessible collection of insanity is the perfect place to jump in.

Opening with the hilarious and supernaturally catchy *Teenagers Don't Know Shit ('they'll fuck up your house and they cannot fix a car')*, a cowbell-banging, organ-drenched 70s riff-rock pastiche, the album offers up everything from jumpy synth-punk to sarcasm-smothered power-balladry. This is one of the most fun – and oddly wholesome – rock'n'roll riots you'll stumble across all year.

The Sweat

Maximum Saturation

SELF-RELEASED

HTTPS://THESWEAT1.BANDCAMP.COM/

Befitting their name, this London mob play gritty, no-frills, loose-limbed rock'n'roll. Taking their cues from early-70s Stones and late-70s pub rock, they can belt out straight-ahead garage rock crunchers with easy grace, but they really shine on full-blown 70s arena rockers like *Yes I Like It*. Which I do.

The Northern Rockets

Self-titled KAFADAN KONTAK

Extremely self-assured Spanish riff-rock with all the swaggering, chest-thumping confidence of the '72-era Alice Cooper band. And while the Rockets are clearly inspired by the golden gods of yore, this is no retread of past glories. It's fresh, hooky and rocks like crazy. If there are any arenas left in five years, the Rockets will be playing one.

Mad Dogs

We Are Ready to Testify

GO DOWN

The title suggests an allegiance to Detroit rock city insurgents like the MC5, and that is certainly on tap here. Third album from these Italian stallions delivers high-flying revolution rock somewhere between their proto-punk heroes and the Scandinavian hordes that copped their action two decades later. It's a jammer, through and through.

The Savage Kind

Love Songs for Bastards

MURDER COW

Catchy, snotty garage-pop from these St Louis house wreckers. With a sound that spans everything from mid-60s big beat to snarling 70s punk, Savage Kind's one and only mission is to fling sweat and shake some action. Highlights include jittery pogo-punk, gritty, infectious power-pop and Ramones-y garage punk.

Thunder

All The Right Noises BMG

Album number thirteen is an effortless master class in rock'n'roll light and shade.

Well, if there's one thing you can say for definite about Thunder's thirteenth studio album, it's that the roll continues. Having returned to the fray with 2015's triumphant *Wonder Days*, Luke Morley, Danny Bowes and co. seem to be mining an endlessly generous seam of rock'n'roll gold. Given the events of the past year or so, this is precisely the kind of thing that hits the spot – top-drawer tunes and no-nonsense, full-throttle delivery, with chief writer Morley clearly fuelled by anger and frustration, but still finding inspiration to lighten the mood with some cheery, upbeat rockers.

If you're going to tackle serious stuff then you might as well go big straight from the off. Here it's with the urgent and driven *Last One Out Turn Off The Lights*, putting the boot into Brexit, followed directly by possibly the heaviest song the band have ever written, *Destruction*, about mental illness and depression, and then we have *The Smoking Gun*, a low-key acoustic number smouldering with righteous fury.

It's quite a triple whammy to kick off the album with, and the dark mood is echoed on *Force Of Nature*, focusing on Donald Trump and what must have gone through his mind as he rose to power, the brooding *Don't Forget To Live Before You Die* (carpe diem, baby), and *St George's Day*, which, dissects immigration and intolerance.

Fortunately the heavy stuff is expertly balanced by some wonderfully carefree feelgood rockers. *Going To Sin City*, where *'bad girls and pretty boys strut their stuff'*, is a gloriously low-slung stomper. *She's A Millionaires* is a bright and breezy piss-taking rocker (*'She can't be too blond and she can't be too thin'*). *Young Man* is propelled by an infectiously bouncy riff. The strutting, cheeky *You're Gonna Be My Girl* is decorated with honky-tonk piano and has a middle section surely designed for crowd participation for when such things can happen again. And sitting in the middle of it all is *I'll Be The One*, one of the finest ballads the band have ever written, featuring a rather ace Morley guitar solo.

Honest, consistent and uncompromising, *All The Right Noises* is quite the classy tour de force of songwriting prowess and pacy execution, with Thunder sounding enraged, engaged and thoroughly energised throughout. Which is just what we need right now.

Essi Berelian

Architects

For Those That Wish To Exist EPITAPH

It's no laughing matter.

On this, Architects' ninth studio album, the Brighton metalcore band turn their attention both outwards and inwards: ferocious, barely contained rage directed towards global dysfunction and the looming, ever-increasing threats to mankind and the notion of personal responsibility, taking control of destiny. Ebb and choke. Thrum and distemper. Beauty lies smouldering among the ruins, or maybe threatens to blossom from society's ruins.

The mood on songs such as dystopian standout *Discourse Is Dead* and the thunderous, anthemic *Demi God* is claustrophobic, tumultuous; fury and silence combine to tackle the (as the band put it) "paralysing negativity of defeatism". Defiant, bracing, candid. The violin-laden closer *Dying Is Absolutely Safe* is gut-wrenchingly and unashamedly beautiful.

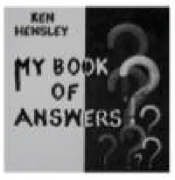
This album exists as a mighty 'fuck you' to those who would have you give up and accept what passes for the new reality, offering instead pathways and alternatives to a dead-end journey to extinction.

Everett True

Ken Hensley

My Book Of Answers CHERRY RED

Former Uriah Heep keyboard player signs off with well-meaning curiosity.



Much-travelled Ken Hensley, an ex-member of Uriah Heep, Blackfoot and more, completed this album shortly before he passed away last November at the age of 75. A further, unrelated collection, recorded prior to *My Book Of Answers*, is due for release later this year.

Hensley's final project is something of an anomaly. Following a random meeting at Alicante Airport, while in lockdown he formulated rock songs around the poems of Vladimir Emelin. With his Russian collaborator a non-English speaker, the process became even more complicated.

After 55 years of familiarity, Hensley's voice is comfortable and easy on the ear, and his command of the Hammond organ and slide guitar effortless. He does a better than expected job of bringing Emelin's poems to musical life, with the Heep-esque *Cover Girl* and *The Darkest Hour* among its highlights. However, the often stilted-sounding results struggle to overcome the hurdle of the circumstances in which they were made.

Dave Ling

Damon Johnson & The Get Ready

Battle Lessons DOUBLE DRAGON

Journeyman guitarist shoots for the stadiums.

Rock history is strewn with the twitching corpses of sidemen who thought they could go it alone, but Damon Johnson's decision to tear up his meal ticket in Black Star Riders looks less insane with every solo release. A long career standing stage-left of bigger stars like Alice Cooper has evidently rubbed off, and while Johnson's riffs throw dependable hard-rock shapes the choruses of these songs have stadium aspirations.

The opening tracks in particular are drive-time dynamite, with *Can't Clap Any Louder* living up to the billing, and *Talk Yourself Into Everything* offering a brilliantly louche swing that would make Steven Tyler (a one-time beneficiary of Johnson's songwriting skills) green with envy. *Battle Lessons* never quite beats those two standouts, but stick around for the breakneck *Lightning Bolt* and *Love Is All You Left Behind*, the latter a smashed-heart ballad that deserves to cause a national lighter fluid shortage.

Henry Yates

DeWolff

Wolffpack MASCOT

Pandemic-defying feel-good rock'n'roll.

DeWolff do not like being idle. This much is evident from their output over the past three years – *Thrust* (2018), *Live & Outta Sight II* (2019) and the stripped-down *Tascam Tapes* (2020) – and despite the pandemic cutting short their touring last year the trio set about creating *Wolffpack*, an antidote to the shoestring demo style of *Tascam Tapes*.

This is full-on psychedelic rock, with the ubiquitous swirling

Hammond bringing the feel of an off-kilter Deep Purple to tunes like *Yes You Do* and *Lady J*, while *Bona Fide* rides an absolutely smoking swampy slide riff. *R U My Savior?*, *Do Me*, *Sweet Loretta* and *Half Of Your Love* feature the kind of knowing nods to classic disco, soul and funk that signal a deep connection to the original source – you simply can't make music this organic and stylish without being a fan. Indeed *Treasure City Moonchild* could be the fuzzed-up theme tune to a cult blaxploitation movie, it's so on the button.

DeWolff are completely in their element here: loose, groovy and partying like it's 1969.

Essi Berelian

Lee Kerslake

Eleventeen CHERRY RED

Fitting farewell from former Ozzy and Heep drummer.

Lee Kerslake passed away last September, so there's something poignant about his debut solo album being released now. But putting aside such thoughts, judged solely on its musical merits *Eleventeen* is a fine record.

Due to health issues It took Kerslake three years to complete, and it's a joyous collection of eight tracks showcasing his remarkably strong voice and wide influences. Opener *Celia Sienna* is sensitive, while *Take Nothing For Granted* wouldn't be out of place on an early-80s Uriah Heep album. He shows his more raucous side on the honky-tonk fun of *Port And A Brandy*, and does a fine interpretation of Carole King's *You've Got A Friend*, before the instrumental *Mom* provides a sedate timbre to close with.

Kerslake's personal notes on each song suggests he knew this would be his final work. It's a welcome reminder of his skills.

Malcolm Dome

Strawbs

Settlement ESOTERIC ANTENNA

Signs of the times.

This follow-up to 2017's *The Ferryman's Curse* finds David Cousins rallying the troops from splendid isolation, but the songs are so finely judged that recording remotely isn't an obstacle.

The title-track opener offers a Dark Horseman delivering retribution. Zany, progressive and packed with Dave's 'sturm und drang', it belongs in a space occupied by Michael Chapman or Bowie. Cousins is in remarkable voice, his lyrics better than ever. *Judgement Day* is like an elongated *Five Years,* with Chas Kronk's dancing bass helping sweep the nth-degree metaphor along. Killer guitar solos are to be expected, and are well provided on *Each Manner Of Man*.

But there are traps to be laid. *The Visit* is a country-folk ballad with a chorus reminiscent of The Byrds, while *We Are Everyone* contains the essence of Cousins' approach: nostalgia, optimism in small doses, and a full-on mantra that urges "Come together". This is how we live now.

Max Bell

Fates Warning

Long Day Good Night

METAL BLADE

Virtuoso majesty with a whole lot of soul.

Not content with delivering another splendid Armored Saint album in 2020, bassist Joey Vera has written and produced the strongest Fates Warning album in a long time.

Long Day Good Night flows beautifully, from the serene ambience that ushers in epic opener *The Destination Onward*, right up to the elegant haze of the aptly titled *The Last Song*. The Connecticut crew's sound remains firmly in the widescreen and highly melodic prog-metal realm that they've had since the early 90s, but there is an emotional potency to everything here that swiftly outstrips recent records. Vocalist Ray Alder is on towering form throughout, bringing pathos and soul to the ornate and intricate *The Way Home* and scaling the octaves during the snappier likes of *Alone We Walk* and *Begin Again*. Meanwhile, the twinkling sprawl of *The Longest Shadow Of The Day* takes Fates Warning into fusion territory, with mesmerising results.

Dom Lawson

Ego Kill Talent

The Dance Between Extremes BMG

Earworm pop-metal from Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Two albums in and Ego Kill Talent have hit on a winning formula – basically a refinement of the blueprint laid down with their 2017 debut, but with bags more melody and a far keener ear for sparkling choruses. It really doesn't seem like an accident that they've supported bands like Shinedown and Foo Fighters in the past, because the similarity in sound makes them an almost perfect fit. *The Dance Between Extremes* was even recorded at Studio 606, bringing an uplifting Foo-style feel.

Key to their success is Jonathan Dörr's soaring vocals, which are irresistible when they lock into the super-tight riffery (a combo that's particularly effective on *In Your Dreams Tonight*, *The Call* and *Our Song*). Crafted for instant, maximum impact, these songs are arena-ready and signal a bright future for EKT – once they can get themselves on stage again.

Essi Berelian

Lovehoney

Lovehoney MIND UNDER BRIDGE

Long-playing calling card from rising Big Apple rockers.

New York quartet Lovehoney are a reminder of why many of us fell for the joys of fuzzed-up, amplified rock music in the first place. Dropping visceral licks with a rhythm section that targets the hips, they're smart enough to know that the roll counts as much as the rock. Witness the funky ramalama of *Soul Crusher* and *Sandman Night*'s psychedelic grooves propelled by Alysia Quinones's full-throated and commanding vocals. A devastating combination, its force is confirmed with the detonation of *You*.

Although the down-tempo shift mid-album slightly outstays its welcome, there's still plenty of rock'n'roll grit throughout this electrifying debut.

Julian Marszalek

ROUND-UP: BLUES

By Henry Yates

Selwyn Birchwood: delivering a rowdy brand of blues.

IVY NEVILLE/PRESS

Selwyn Birchwood

Living In A Burning House

ALLIGATOR

Nine years after Alligator Records president Bruce Iglauer took a long bet on a guy from Florida who'd just lost the 2012 International Blues Challenge, Selwyn Birchwood has matured into the jewel in the Chicago label's roster. Critically, though, he hasn't matured too much. As evidenced by *I Got Drunk, Laid And Stoned* – a chest-puffed-out braggadocio anthem spiced with fat brass and rabid slide guitar – Birchwood is still making a rowdy brand of blues, seemingly unlikely to suit up or slow down any time soon.

The pepped-up *You Can't Steal My Shine* is a hilarious middle finger to a woman stripping him for parts ('*You can have my house, cos I'm always on the road*'). But even Birchwood's weightier themes groove like bastards, with *Rock Bottom* cataloguing his personal hell ('*anger, depression, growing resentment*') over hot-buttered funk, and *Revelation* chronicling the apocalypse as the band turn the dancefloor to dust.

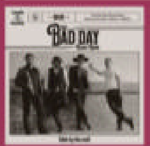
A.J. Croce

By Request COMPASS

This stellar covers album catches the vibe of a juiced-up after-hours singalong in the songwriter's Nashville music room. Even if you could shout out requests, you couldn't do much better than Croce's choice of songs: try the joy-filled take on Billy Preston's *Nothing From Nothing*, or rest your drink on his piano lid to yowl through the Faces' *Stay With Me*.

The Bad Day Blues Band

Table By The Wall LUNARIA



The opening cover of *Hold On, I'm Comin'* announces the BDBB's power, but it's the originals that suggest better days to come. The title track shares a little of the sozzled chaos of a lost Faces session. Elsewhere *The Hustler* is like a better-humoured Zeppelin, while *Hurricane*'s '*blow me down*' hook is ludicrously good fun.

Grainne Duffy

Voodoo Blues SELF-RELEASED

The Irish bandleader's voice has always had the perfect ratio of honey to shrapnel, but her co-writes with husband/guitarist Paul Sherry just keep getting better. The title track puts hollers in all the right places, *Roll It* does Sheryl Crow better than the star herself, while *Shine It On Me* is the kind of sunblissed pop-rock that in any sane universe would be a crossover hit.

Alabama Slim

The Parlor

CORNELIUS CHAPEL

It only took a snatched four-hour session in New Orleans to track *The Parlor*, but you could argue that Alabama Slim has spent his 80-odd years building up the character for it. A cycling groove and stomp tee up these tunes, and the croaking voice – fit to be mentioned in the same ragged breath as John Lee Hooker – does the rest

THE HARD STUFF ALBUMS

Kings Of Leon

When You See Yourself RCA

A time capsule from the pre-pandemic age, KOL's eighth remains remarkably relevant.

As calls grow for humanity to forget 2020 ever happened and start 2021 where 2019 left off, Kings Of Leon return with the perfect opportunity. Their eighth album, recorded pre-pandemic and steeped in the hazy euphoria of warm festival nights and wide open space. Where *When You See Yourself* appears to comment on 2020's many horrors, it's merely an augur of dark times ahead. *'A fire's gonna rage if people don't change,'* Caleb Followill warns on *Claire And Eddie*, predicting last year's wildfires, on a lovelorn lament for mankind's relationship with the planet. *'I'm going nowhere,'* he muses on the Cure-like *Supermarket*, a lyric from 2008 granted added import mid-lockdown.

If the record sounds particularly relevant, though, it only reflects KOL's evolution. The last time they were kissing cousins with the zeitgeist was on their emergence as the Southern Strokes in 2003; for much of the past 20 years they've hovered along in their own – hugely successful – sphere of timeless anthemic country rock. With 2018's *Walls*, however, producer Markus Dravs hooked them back up to the contemporary grid, and *When You See Yourself* is their most clued-in record in a decade.

Opener *When You See Yourself, Are You Far Away* shares the bass-driven spaciousness of Death Cab For Cutie, and elsewhere hints of Lanterns On The Lake's ghostliness, Tame Impala's sepia psychedelia and The National's propulsive atmospherics colour the frame. Judging by the clattering drums and horns on *Golden Restless Age*, one of the album's more ebullient high points, someone's been mainlining The National's *Buzzblood Ohio*.

Golden Restless Age and tropical psych groover *Stormy Weather* are the youthful heart of the album, where Caleb dissects the beauty, anxiety and wild romantic folly of uncertain salad days. They're balanced by a rich seam of introspection and experience: the gently cosmic *Fairytale*, laced with crackling antique orchestration, lifts the lid on the struggles behind the scenes of an A-list marriage, while *A Wave* and *Supermarket* document the crutches we resort to to get us through the darker nights – the latter, originally written in the wake of the band's *Only By The Night*, confesses: *'It's a long, hard road'* and *'I'll never be home again till I get clean'*.

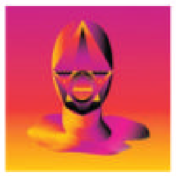
The record always retains a weightless air, though, of cares drifting free, epitomised by the pure Gary Cooper escapism of Wild West saga *The Bandit*. A record of life-worn wisdom, hard times and hope. How very 2021.

Mark Beaumont

Osees

Metamorphosed ROCK IS HELL

More mind-scrambling missives from Californian shapeshifters.



Any other band following up a 17 track, 80-minute opus – in their case 2019's *Face Stabber* – with five tracks that didn't make the cut might be accused of scraping the artistic barrel. But not the Osees.

Having tested the sonic boundaries last time around, here John Dwyer heads even further out, veering from neighbour-baiting thrash metal (*The Saignant*) to burbling space-rock (*Electric War*) to eerie glitch-rock (a topical *The Virologist*). Fans will enjoy propulsive psych banger *Weird And Wasted Connection*, but the best is saved until last, hypnotic 23-minute closer *I Got A Lot*. A restless, slow-burning fusion of tribal rhythms, squalling guitars and other-worldly synths laced with a paranoic whispered vocal, it's further proof that Dwyer is happy to travel into realms few others would dare venture.

Uneven and unearthly in equal measure.

Paul Moody

Mogwai

As The Love Continues ROCK ACTION

Sound sense.

Apparently it's been 25 years since Mogwai released their first single. In that time they have seen off a plethora of world events, remaining unaffected by war, famine and Britpop. But in 2019 the tides of history struck Mogwai hard astern as they were preparing to travel to the United States to record a new album with producer David Fridmann. What that set of Trump-surrounded tracks might have sounded like we'll never know, because Mogwai's tenth studio album, *As The Love Continues*, was recorded in Worcestershire instead, with Fridmann producing remotely from the US.

With contributions from Atticus Ross and Colin Stetson, *As The Love Continues* sees Mogwai's voyage into sound progress in a stately manner as tracks like *Here We, Here We, Here We Go Forever* and the misnomered *Fuck Off Money* tread an unlikely fine line between waft and heft. Like ghosts in steel toecapped boots, these tunes occupy a tough mist of their own, sometimes poppy (the jaunty *Supposedly, We Were Nightmares*) and sometimes very much not (the imperial *To The Bin My Friend, Tonight We Vacate Earth*).

A very good record.

David Quantick

Joanna Connor

4801 South Indiana Avenue KTBA

Sweet home Chicago.

You can be forgiven for not knowing Joanna Connor, but she's been playing the blues for nearly 40 years and making albums for 30. Way back when, a young Joe Bonamassa supported her at the House Of Blues in her adopted city of Chicago. Now that he's got his own label he gets to repay the favour.

You will know her now. *4801 South Indiana Avenue* (the address of the "hallowed funky blues sanctuary" Theresa's Lounge) is a blistering romp through the Chicago blues textbook, from the frenetic *Destination*, through the raw slide guitar of the steady driving *Come Back To Me*, the grinding slow blues of Luther Allison's *Bad News* (for whom is that bell tolling?), the boogie of *I Feel So Good*, Albert King's retitled *For The Love Of A Man*… on and on until Connor and Bonamassa finally set you down, saturated, with a refined slide duet.

Hugh Fielder

The Nova Hawks

Redemption FRONTIERS

Children of the grave.

You can take the Nova Hawks out of the Black Country – and somebody already has because singer Heather Leoni and guitarist Rex Whitehall, aka Rex Roulette, apparently wrote the songs for their debut album in London, New York and Los Angeles – but you can't take the Black Country out of the Nova Hawks. The sheep's clothing may have an internet-friendly metallic sheen but the wolf has a Sabbath-like glint and the spectre of the supernatural is seldom far away.

But they'll need to get their

skates on. So far the duo haven't revealed themselves in their videos for *Voodoo* or the album's title track, and there's no sign of a band as yet. Meanwhile the Pretty Reckless are poised with another album.

Hugh Fielder

Lee Rocker

Gather Round UPRIGHT

Stray Cats bass thumper twangs up a storm.

The return of the Stray Cats to both stage and studio in recent years reminded us just what a potent force Lee Rocker is with an upright bass. Even when not accompanied by Cats Brian Setzer and Slim Jim Phantom he has the voice and the grooves to start plenty of fires, as this first original album since 2007 shows.

When Nothing's Going Right and *The Dog House Shuffle* are irresistible rockabilly stompers, while *Everybody Wants To Be A Cat* has a suitably alley-style prowl to it. His brothel creepers leave less of a print on more mid-paced 50s pop styles, but the syncopated tap-and-thrum his bass creates on *A Dirty Martini* makes for a rousing platform as organ and guitar pirouette drunkenly around it.

Johnny Sharp

Michael Schenker Group

Immortal NUCLEAR BLAST

Musical resurrection of an iconic band.

It's been 12 years since Michael Schenker released any original music under the MSG banner. Now he's revived that name on an album stuffed with majestic music.

Bringing in a raft of talent including vocalists Joe Lynn Turner and Ronnie Romero, keyboard player Derek Sherinian, bassist Barry Sparks and drummer Simon Phillips, Schenker achieves a quality reminiscent of that on the first three MSG albums. The songs are accomplished and powerful, and Schenker unleashes stunning forays that memorably embroider the tracks. Whether firing through the high pace of *Drilled To Kill* or taking a more sedate route on *Don't Die On Me Now*, the guitarist inspirationally sets the tone. The closing track is a reimagining of his former band the Scorpions' *In Search Of The Piece Of Mind*, the first song Schenker ever recorded. This version is monumental.

The best MSG album since 1982's *Assault Attack*.

Malcolm Dome

You Me At Six

Suckapunch UNDERDOG

When you've loved and lost like You Me At Six...

Life comes at you fast. One moment YMAS were headlining three nights at Brixton Academy, the next they'd hit their thirties and been dumped. Admittedly that's compressing the band's time line for brevity's sake, but however you look at it they were heading into album number seven, and a new decade, with three members at the sharp end of relationship wreckage. Echoes, in part, of Biffy Clyro, whose latest album was informed by business and personal break-ups.

It's Biffy Clyro producer Dan Austin who adds lustre to YMAS's lonely bones too. Their scratchy, howls of rage, and fuzzy guitars tempered with loops and beats, which only enhances the primal angst. Especially good is *Beautiful Way*. A song brimming with impotent fury, it's the sound of a band kicking the metaphorical furniture over. The lingering *Glasgow* is the last breath of a dying relationship, the final exhalation and then out.

Philip Wilding

Ricky Warwick

When Life Was Hard And Fast NUCLEAR BLAST

Black Star Riders frontman's seventh under his own name.

Ricky Warwick's six previous solo albums have ranged from acoustic Americana to full-on rock (plus a Britney Spears cover) underlining what a complex soul Warwick is.

When Life Was Hard And Fast mirrors that complexity. Mainly it's a big rock record, made with former Buckcherry men Keith Nelson (as guitarist, co-writer and producer) and Xavier Muriel (drums), alongside Black Star Riders bassist Robbie Crane. Joe Elliott sings backing vocals on the title track, Luke Morley plays guitar on another, Andy Taylor does likewise on a third... But then there are real contrasts such as *Clown Of Misery* (a lo-fi demo) or *Time Don't Seem To Matter*, written for, and featuring, his youngest daughter Pepper.

By turns the album is fast and punky – as on the Mink DeVille cover *Gunslinger* or Warwick's own compositions *Never Corner A Rat* and *You're My Rock 'N Roll* – or delivering moments of Lizzy-esque majesty in *Fighting Heart* and *Still Alive*, and the Springsteen-lite *I Don't Feel At Home*, featuring Dizzy Reed on keyboards. If the songs weren't good, such a panorama wouldn't hold together. But they are, and it does.

Neil Jeffries

The Hold Steady

Open Door Policy POSITIVE JAMS

Brooklyn's anthemic bar rockers find new life beyond the burn-out.

Run as hard as you might, the good times will catch up with you. If the party kids, gamblers and libertines that raged through the dive-bar Springsteen anthems of The Hold Steady's breakthrough album *Boys And Girls In America* in 2006 showed early signs of addiction and psychological issues, 15 years on they're full-blown fuck-ups.

Open Door Policy, THS's eighth record, is a litany of drug addicts, cheats, deadbeats and the mentally demolished. Even the band themselves, attempting to merge the rejuvenated elation of 2019's *Thrashing Thru The Passion* with the more serious records that preceded it, sound like they're grabbing at big choruses like an alcoholic scrabbling for a bedside breakfast whisky. But on *The Feelers*, the motoric *Spices* and *Me & Magdalena*, Craig Finn's sneered diatribe about a manipulative rock junkie, they nonetheless stumble across a rich, National-like lustre of dark grooves and opiated euphoria. And even this broken, they can still party: *Family Farm*, a jubilant mariachi rock blast (complete with flagrant steal from Weezer's *Surf Wax America*) even manages to find the upside in being sectioned.

Mark Beaumont

BEST OF THE REST

Other new releases out this month.

Weezer

OK Human CRUSH MUSIC/ATLANTIC

Orchestrated, analogue, packed with typically smart, reliably unshakeable River Cuomo compositions, this is Weezer's social media/lockdown-atuned *Pet Sounds*. An unlikely masterpiece. **9/10**

Reach

The Promise Of Life ICONS CREATING EVIL ART

Swedes with huge ambition, Reach tap into Muse for falsetto grandeur, Queen for megarock majesty (with a hint of knowing naffness) and Lady GaGa for earworm-driven chutzpah. Immense. **8/10**

Evert Snyman

Hot Mess MONGREL

Coming across like a hyper-psychedelicised one-man QOTSA, Johannesburg's Snyman (Ruff Majik) is a multi-instrumentalist and producer who writes as brilliantly as he jams (with himself). Recommended. **8/10**

Sam Coffey & The Iron Lungs

Real One DINE ALONE

Like Springsteen before, Sam Coffey's Iron Lungs, so fresh from the garage they're still exhaling carbon monoxide, make honest blue-collar rock epic with the sheer breadth of their ambition. **7/10**

The Lickerish Quartet

Threesome Vol 2 LOJINX

With enough ideas in its four constituent parts to fuel a respectable double prog concept work, this celestial blurt of perfect cerebral pop (worthy of an on-form XTC) verges on being too good for its own good. **8/10**

The Straddlerz

The Straddlerz SELF-RELEASED

Power-packed, lick-laced sleaze from a Modena-based, Bowery-born duo of Argentinian vocalist Linda Filippin and Italian guitarist Michael Reynal. Shrill thrills and killer skills to more than pay the bills. **7/10**

White Void

Anti NUCLEAR BLAST

Nordic complexity ahoy as this dense combination of alumni from Borknagar and Ihsahn with blues and electronica protagonists produce a seething miasma of concepts, nagging hooks and dark, unrelenting power. **7/10**

Black Pistol Fire

Look Alive BLACK HILL

A genre-averse, future-proof blues duo for the 21st century, guitarist/vocalist Kevin McKeown and drummer/bassist/synth player Eric Owen twist rock tropes through a heavily grooved R&B filter. May contain disco. **8/10**

The Martha's Vineyard Ferries

Suns Out Guns Out MATADOR

Preppy East Coast indie trio (Shellac's Bob Weston, Kahoots' Elisha Wiesner, Codiene's Chris Brokaw), back after a seven-year hiatus, further dislocate pop norms with engaging edgy darkness. **7/10**

Nik Turner & Youth

Interstellar Energy YOUTH SOUNDS/CADIZ

Former Hawkwind sax legend and Killing Joke production maestro join forces with experimental sonic explorers the Space Falcons for trippy, kosmische-laced grooving. Roll up, roll up! As it were. **7/10**

Tamar Aphek

All Bets Are Off KILL ROCK STARS

A sultry, smouldering, non-committal vocal meanders over bass-heavy backdrops as jazzy beats paradiddle haphazardly, Farfisa organs blurt and Israel's 'guitar goddess' twangs with an audible pout. **5/10**

The Snuts

W.L. PARLOPHONE

A game of two halves, with the schizophrenic West Lothian quartet veering between spiky, guitar-toting indie chancers and tear-choked commerce-pop emoters. Could please all. Or none. **6/10**

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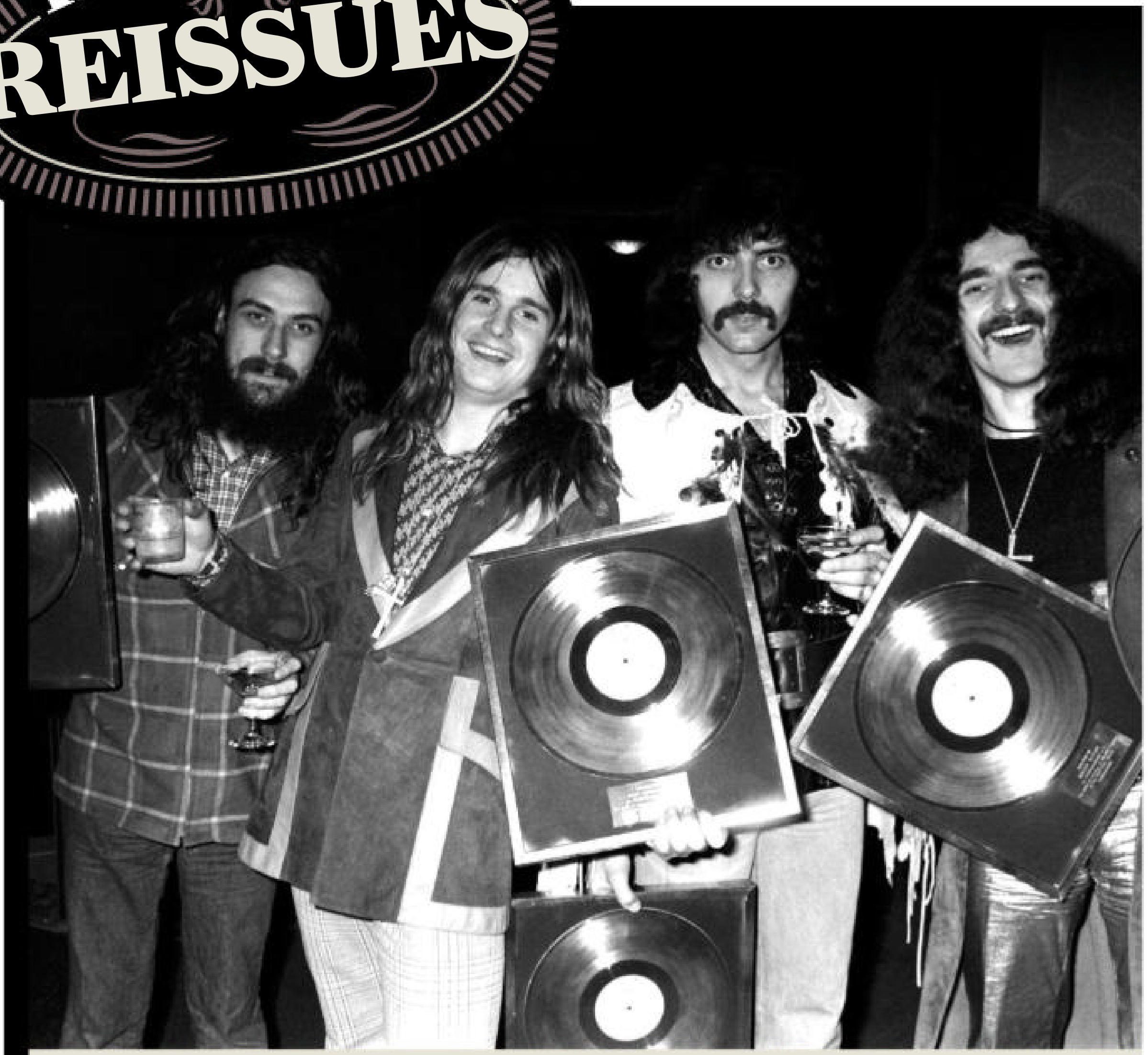
THE HARD STUFF REISSUES



Black Sabbath

Vol 4 Super Deluxe Edition *BMG*

Four-CD/five-vinyl box, containing everything except the Class-A narcotics that fuelled it.

The credits famously include: "We wish to thank the great COKE-Cola Company of Los Angeles" in barely coded reference to the heaps of cocaine consumed during its recording. This after the band's plan to make *Snowblind* its title-track was overruled by their label.

The cocaine, plus opting to produce themselves (alongside manager Patrick Meehan), having previously only recorded in England with Rodger Bain, might appear a recipe for disaster, but after lengthy and expensive sessions at LA's Record Plant studios in 1972 Sabbath's fourth album is no hedonistic shambles.

Like its predecessors it has moments of softness (the acoustic instrumental *Laguna Sunrise*, the ballad *Changes* and the 90 seconds of sonic tomfoolery *FX*). But whereas the first three albums are all doom classics, *Vol 4* red-lined the metal. The riffs peaked on *Supernaut*, a face-melting boogie supported by Geezer Butler's booming bass bombs, Ozzy Osbourne being maniacal and Bill Ward delivering a drum break to die for. But all 10 songs (now remastered) sound rich and timeless.

Steven Wilson has also lovingly curated around 79 minutes of previously unreleased alternative recordings across two CDs. The first disc has five nearly complete numbers awaiting (variously) guitar solos, Mellotron and string sections – as well as the final lyrics that Butler must have brought along very late in the day. *Wheels Of Confusion* (one of six songs played live in the preceding months), was even here an eco-friendly anthem. The second disc contains alternative/incomplete takes beginning with five stabs at *Wheels Of Confusion* (which Ozzy assures the engineer is called *Bollocks*), followed by a beautifully fluid Iommi guitar solo in *The Straightener*, the coda taped separately. The first of two *Supernauts* has a slightly slower tempo. The second features the guitarist inexplicably overcomplicating one of his greatest riffs and Ward struggling with the intro.

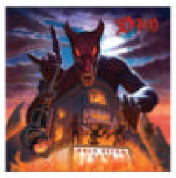
The fourth CD (discs four and five on vinyl) re-sequences live performances from the March 1973 UK tour, heard previously as *Live At Last* (1980) and part of *Past Lives* (2002). Former Free engineer Richard Digby Smith's new mix proves third time lucky, and outshines even the glorious 60-page booklet. In that, Butler admits that Sabbath spent more on cocaine than they did on renting the studio. Thankfully, long days wired prevented them settling for any of the works-in-progress, instead knuckling down until they had absolutely nailed *Vol 4*'s final, brilliant versions.

Neil Jeffries

Dio

Reissues *BMG*

A live pair expanded.



Almost 11 years after the passing of Ronnie James Dio, two of his band's live albums have been pulled out of the vaults, remastered and repackaged as triple-vinyl gatefold releases, double-CD mediabooks and of course digital delights.

Evil Or Divine: Live In New York City (2005, **8/10**) was recorded in December 2002 at New York's Roseland Ballroom. The strident title song of that year's *Killing The Dragon* album ably kicks off this powerful record, which blends Dio, Rainbow and Black Sabbath classics with less celebrated, but still worthy, songs from Dio's twilight years. While this reissue features two extra tracks compared to the 2005 edition, be advised that one of these is Simon Wright's drum solo. The two differing vinyl versions also each throw in four previously released album tracks.

Holy Diver Live (2006, **8/10**) captures Dio playing their entire debut album in October 2005 at the much-missed Astoria Theatre in London. In the process, they expose *Holy Diver*'s filler tracks *Invisible* and *Gypsy* (which incorporates yet another a drum solo from Simon Wright), but it's still nice to hear live versions. Meanwhile, *Stand Up And Shout*, the title-track, *Don't Talk To Strangers* and *Rainbow In The Dark* are extraordinary moments in metal history. The set's second half places the emphasis on a celebration of Ronnie's time with Rainbow and Sabbath.

While 2013's *Finding The Sacred Heart* remains the finest Dio live album of them all, these two offer way more Heaven than Hell.

Jason Arnopp

Legs Diamond

Reissues *ROCK CANDY*

Cult heroes' second and third acts.

In the late 70s, LA band Legs Diamond (named after a Prohibition-era mobster) recorded three albums of finely crafted hard rock in which keyboard player Michael Prince's mastery of the Hammond organ had them hyped as America's answer to Deep Purple. But the big break never came, and in 1980 the band split. But the story did not end there.

Those 70s albums, reissued in 2018, have long been revered by connoisseurs of vintage American rock. The same is true of the three that the band made during a first comeback, in the mid-80s, and a second in 1990, all of which are now available again.

Out On Bail (1984, **7/10**) is the best of the three, its title track a balls-out rocker with a wonderfully OTT vocal from Rick Sanford, and *Walkaway* a minor classic of pure AOR. *Land Of The Gun* (1986, **6/10**) has a slicker sound, typified by the atmospheric title track. And on *Town Bad Girl* (1990, **5/10**) there's more classy stuff, even if the cover image was anything but – all very *Smell The Glove*.

Remarkably, a new Legs Diamond album is coming soon. The legend lives on!

Paul Elliott

Bolt Thrower

Reissues *METAL BLADE*

Cum on feel the riffs.

Now-defunct Coventry metallers Bolt Thrower rose from the primordial soup that was the UK's grind scene of the mid-to-late 1980s. Their 1988 debut album *In Battle There Is No Law!* married death-metal vocals to mutated, down-tuned Slayer riffs and war-obsessed lyrics. Over time, as the band honed their own style, they also incorporated goth-tinged melody.

When at full steam, Bolt Thrower were every riff lover's delight, thanks to guitarists Barry Thomson and Gavin Ward. While their sixth studio album *Mercenary* (1998, **6/10**) carried many such moments of brilliance, the band sounded rather less inspired and psyched than on previous records.

Honour-Valour-Pride (2002, **7/10**) shook things up, as Dave Ingram of Benediction replaced founding frontman Karl Willetts and the band explored slower, more melodic avenues within the realms of death. Listen closely and you'll even hear the odd concession to alt.rock.

The band once stated that they would split if they ever made the perfect Bolt Thrower album. Sure enough, their swansong *Those Once Loyal* (2005, **9/10**) came within a grenade's throw of distilling

© MICHAEL PUTLAND/PRESS

everything that was great about them. The riffs rolled like Sherman tanks, morbid guitar melodies tingled the spine, and Willetts was back growling fury into the mic. An epitaph to be proud of.
Jason Arnopp

The Rods
Reissues
ROCK CANDY

New York's street fightin' men get deluxe reissue treatment.

The Rods were formed by former Elf guitarist (and Ronnie Dio's cousin) Rock Feinstein at the dawn of the 80s, and their rough-'n'-ready street-metal should have positioned them as a sort of American AC/DC (or Rose Tattoo, at the very least), but the usual clusterfuck of bad timing and bad management hobbled their ambitions. Still, in quick succession they released five albums full of raw, feral rock'n'roll, three of which are presented here in welcome expanded editions.

In The Raw (1983) finds the band untied from their major-label deal with Arista, given free reign to thrash out dirty, lo-fi hard rock like *Hurricane* and *Hot Love*, anchored by Carl Canedy's concrete-cracking drums and Feinstein's unhinged screech. That same year brought *The Rods Live*, essentially a frantic best-of served with thrashy, in-the-red fury. *Let Them Eat Metal* ('84) is the band's best-known record, a gorgeously excessive slab of hard American power metal that features some of their hardest – and sleaziest – tracks.

Perrenially and shamefully underrated, The Rods' stripped-down maximum rock'n'roll is prime for rediscovery, and these comprehensive reissues, full of bonus tracks, live cuts and photo-packed booklets, are the perfect place to start.

All
Sleazegrinder

Melvins
Reissues IPECAC

New album from *1983* version of the group, and vinyl reissues.

Melvins have been preserved over the decades thanks to a supreme self-confidence and not having been spoiled by too much success. *Working With God* (**7/10**), this line-up's follow-up to their 2013 album *Tres Cabrones*, sees them still flying the tattered pennant, veterans of rock excess dragging their toxified carcass towards the horizon on the likes of *Hot Fish*. *I Fuck Around* facetiously parodies the Beach Boys, *Brian, The Horse-Faced Goon* is refried, twice-baked grunge.

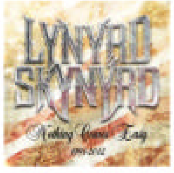
This is the music of men who never went corporate. These are tearaways, who still live, breathe, work and think in a recklessly thrash-happy manner. This is woozy, filthy, heavy-duty fare, uncleansed and unsmoothed by the passing of time. The backward-masking tape antics of *Goodnight Sweetheart* reminds of The Beatles' *Goodnight* at the end of their traumatic White Album, a faux-lullaby rendered as a bedside doo-wop.

Gluey Porch Treatment (1987, **8/10**) was just right for the year in which US indie rock rebounded big-time, the weighted likes of *Eye Fly* making Sabbath sound like Stock, Aitken & Waterman, *Heater Moves And Eyes* laying on the guitars and bass with remorseless, dumper-truck excess.

Hostile Ambient Takeover (2002, **7/10**), comprising a series of vinyl seven-inch releases that are mostly covers, is a rock primer of sorts, as they rework Alice Cooper, the Gun Club, Mott The Hoople and The Tubes, among others, in a positively leaden, inspired, souped-up style, in a properly rampaging, sacrilegious spirit.
David Stubbs

Lynyrd Skynyrd
Nothing Comes Easy 1991-2012 HNE/CHERRY RED

Southern-rock masters not quite in their prime.



There's no doubt that Lynyrd Synyrd's albums in the 70s helped to define the southern rock genre, and those records bear up magnificently today.

Nothing Comes Easy brings together four of the albums they released after their re-formation in 1987. Being brutally honest, none of them stand up against the band's classic records. However, they shouldn't merely be dismissed as irrelevant, as all offer some quality.

Lynyrd Skynyrd 1991 shows that vocalist Johnny Van Zandt wasn't overshadowed by his late brother Ronnie's reputation. Both this album and 1993's *The Last Rebel* work, because the line-up is as close as it could be to the band's glory days.

2009's *Gods & Guns* is the best album Skynyrd have made in the past 30 years. Aided by guest appearances including John 5 and Rob Zombie, it has a very contemporary strut and energy, while still offering traditional southern blues passion. Also included is a six-track bonus EP that has three live performances that prove how strong this version of Skynyrd were.

Finally there's 2012's *Last Of A Dying Breed*. This is the band's most recent studio album, and once more it shows them not stuck in the past, but striving confidently to compete with young southern rockers like Black Stone Cherry.

It's informative to revisit these albums. In recent times, on stage Lynyrd Skynyrd have concentrated on playing only material from their golden era. But when you listen to the songs here, many of them deserve more attention.

Malcolm Dome

Japan
Quiet Life – Deluxe Edition BMG

Post-glam synth-rock classic, now remastered and expanded into three-disc set.

NICOLA TYSON/PRESS

Released at the very end of 1979, Japan's forward-thinking third album initially had a lukewarm reception critically and commercially, earning recognition only after the South London art-rock fops became major-label pop stars two years later. Swapping mascara-metal swagger for androgyne cool and synth-pop modernism, *Quiet Life* now sounds like a prescient stepping stone between glam, post-punk and the emergent New Romantic movement. It also introduced David Sylvian's remarkable new baritone croon, which would come to define all his later releases.

Japan first signalled their futuristic evolution in April 1979 with the non-album single *Life In Tokyo*, a stately blast of louche synth-rock co-written and produced by Eurodisco king Giorgio Moroder, which is included in this remastered box set. But the single didn't chart, and Moroder was deemed a bad fit for the whole album. Instead, *Quiet Life* began the band's fruitful association with former Roxy Music producer John Punter. Ironically, Punter created a dazzling pastiche of Moroder's sleek electro sound on the title track, a pulsing, throbbing, propulsive beauty that is arguably Sylvian's musical peak.

Bowie's *Berlin* period clearly casts a long shadow across *Quiet Life* tracks like *Fall In Love With Me* and *Alien*, all urbane melancholy clothed in lightly discordant art-funk, as well as broody Euro-chansons like *Despair* and the rousing orchestral power ballad *The Other Side Of Life*. A polished electro-lounge cover of the Velvet Underground classic *All Tomorrow's Parties* might have sounded sacrilegious at the time, but nowadays it feels very much in the cerebral avant-rock spirit of Lou Reed and John Cale.

Inevitably, the two extra discs are thick with superfluous alternative and extended mixes. But there are fine non-album singles here too, notably the glossy synth-funk stomper *European Son* and a plastic-soul remake of Smokey Robinson's *I Second That Emotion*. Also included is the four-track *Live In Japan* EP first released in 1980, and a full live album recorded at the same show. The latter's lo-fi sound is abrasively raw in places, but more snarly glam-metal numbers like *Halloween* and *Automatic Gun* punch through the sonic sludge, pleasing reminders of Japan's embryonic phase as sleazoid proto-punks in the New York Dolls mould. Glorious.

Stephen Dalton

The Black Crowes

Shake Your Money Maker

UME/AMERICAN RECORDINGS

Their classic debut album, boxed, now with previously unreleased material.

From the very start there was a battle being fought within the Black Crowes; a bitter sibling rivalry between Chris Robinson, the cocky singer for whom prodigious dope smoking lacked a calming effect, and Rich Robinson, the moody guitarist and primary songwriter whose sullen expression suggested that he'd rather be anywhere else but at his brother's side.

As drummer and co-founding member Steve Gorman wrote in his 2019 memoir *Hard To Handle*: "A good day in the Black Crowes was just a day that wasn't bad." But whatever bullshit was going down, when it came to making music the brothers had a deep connection. And what they created with 1990's *Shake Your Money Maker* was one of the all-time great debut albums in American rock'n'roll.

Released on Rick Rubin's Def American label, and produced expertly by Rubin's right-hand man George Drakoulias, *Shake Your Money Maker* was an anomaly in an era when hair-metal was still big business and alternative rock was on the rise. The Crowes had a sound that was both all-American and evocative of the great British groups that had channelled American rock'n'roll, blues and soul in the late 60s and early 70s, notably the Stones, the Faces and Humble Pie.

But the Crowes were a young band, with all the energy that comes with youth; a tight unit, with Gorman and bassist Johnny Colt a swinging rhythm section, and second guitarist Jeff Cease an adept foil for 'young' Rich.

What elevated *Shake Your Money Maker* above mere pastiche, and turned it into a multimillion seller, was a handful of great songs. *Twice As Hard* was the perfect opening track, a swaggering statement of intent. *Jealous Again* rolled like the Faces. *She Talks To Angels*, one of three beautiful slow numbers, was a masterpiece, their *Wild Horses*. A cover of Otis Redding's soul stomper *Hard To Handle* – initially considered a throwaway, a B-side at best – became the breakthrough hit single.

This 30th anniversary box set also includes a bunch of out-takes – one of which, *Charming Mess*, is essentially Rod Stewart's *Hot Legs* with different words – and early demos from when the band were still called Mr. Crowe's Garden. Best of all is a 14-track full set from the Atlanta, Georgia band's homecoming show on the Money Maker tour, with them on a high and the atmosphere triumphant. But of course, being the Black Crowes, that feeling wouldn't last.

Paul Elliott

The Band

Stage Fright (50th Anniversary) *UNIVERSAL*

Across the great divide.

After two albums that opened up a whole new rural landscape for rock'n'roll, for their third album The Band turned inwards. Despite being better protected from the rigours of fame and fortune than most of their contemporaries by secluding themselves in Woodstock, upstate New York, they succumbed to drugs in general and heroin in particular. It broke their easy-going camaraderie and left main songwriter Robbie Robertson groping for partners.

There's a dark introspection on the title track, *The W S Walcott Medicine Show* and *The Shape I'm In*, and the carefree spontaneous harmonies that characterised their earlier albums is notable by its absence. Elsewhere, *Daniel And The Sacred Harp* is about selling your soul for the music – and it's the quality of the music that saves this album.

As for the bonus disc, a previously unreleased concert from London's Royal Albert Hall in June 1971, I was there, and was mesmerised by their set that included a couple of Motown covers, by the sound clarity they achieved in a notoriously echoey venue, and by the way they chopped and changed singers and instruments with almost every song. Robertson remembers it as a great gig too.

Hugh Fielder

Skindred

Roots Rock Riot

HASSLE HINDSIGHT

A joyful, genre-mincing classic from Benji and co.

For the past two decades, Skindred have been a relentless force for uplifting musical good. At this point only a maniac would dispute that they are one of the finest live bands on the planet, but their sturdy catalogue of studio albums has often been overlooked as a result.

Roots Rock Riot, originally released in 2007, is one of their finest. Delivering on its title's promise with plenty of balls-out bravado and genre-mincing glee, it was a unique and exhilarating showcase for a new (and subsequently definitive) Skindred line-up and boasts several songs that remain in the band's set-list to this day. Now on vinyl for the first time, classic 'Dred-bangers *Trouble, Rude Boy For Life* and *Cause Ah Riot* sound as timely and vital as they did 14 years ago, while *Spit Out The Poison* and *State Of Emergency* could easily have been written last week. Three extra songs, including a sublime acoustic *Destroy The Dancefloor*, are a solid bonus. Throughout it all, frontman Benji Webbe sings, roars and toasts like the human embodiment of restless, fizzing, positive energy. Which, of course, he is. Frankly, they should give away this record free with covid vaccinations.

Dom Lawson

Neil Young

After The Gold Rush 50th Anniversary *WARNER*

Classics don't come cheap.

Being 50 years and more since Neil Young, his band Crazy Horse and guitarist Nils Lofgren headed to the canyon to make *After The Gold Rush*, a landmark account of approaching environmental disaster and distilled West Coast whimsy, it really should merit more of a splurge than this reissue. Differences from the original are minimal (the cover is gold stamped '50' in clumsy fashion), and the vinyl version, in a box with repro lyric sheet and a seven-inch version of out-take *Wonderin'*, is so expensive that you might expect Neil to hop out and play the songs for you.

Of course, *After The Gold Rush* will always be a spectacular piece of work. Given that it contains *Southern Man, When You Dance I Can Really Love, Only Love Can Break Your Heart* and the awe-inspiring title track, nothing changes there. The lesser-known *Till The Morning Comes* and the ghostly *Cripple Creek Ferry* typify 'less is more', and the oldest song, *Birds*, might be as compulsive for the listener as it was for the obsessive Young. Recorded while Crazy Horse were at the edge of darkness, *Gold Rush* retains that sense of a young artist about to go rogue, as he did on *Tonight's The Night*. Naturally the CD is a better deal, but who wants CDs these days?

Max Bell

GETTY

Be-Bop Deluxe

Drastic Plastic Deluxe Edition CHERRY RED

Swansong album, before Bill Nelson moved on.

Cherry Red's substantive Be-Bop Deluxe reissue programme now comes to the band's final album, 1977's *Drastic Plastic*. As with previous reissues, this is a minor epic: four CDs containing the original album, a 2020 mix, demos, John Peel sessions and a BBC live In Concert, all of which detail the build-up of the songs and are in themselves both fascinating and informative.

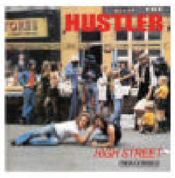
Drastic Plastic stands up well to this treatment, being one of Bill Nelson's most consistent sets of songs. But the consistency masks the moderate inner turmoil of the album's creation. Be-Bop Deluxe were coming to an end, as Nelson realised that the times were no longer right for the group's brand of prog and glam technoflash, and a newer, more stripped-down sound was more apt for the coming era. Hence tracks as gorgeous as *Visions Of Endless Hopes* and *Islands Of The Dead* sit next to Bowiesque rockers like *Panic In The World* and the dream-pop of *Electrical Language*. The future would see Bill Nelson embrace new music more fully, first with his band Red Noise and then as a more ambient, ethereal sort of solo artist, but here are the last, elegant days of Be-Bop Deluxe.

David Quantick

Hustler

Reissues BLACK CAT

Hard rock obscurities now available on CD again.



Fresh from last year's exhumation and completion of their long-lost third album *Reloaded*, using vocal tracks recorded in the mid-80s, Hustler have fulfiled a promise to reclaim the rights to their first two records, released in 1974 and '75. Long out of print, both are remastered and feature sleeve essays plus bonus tracks where possible.

In their heyday the band supported Queen and Status Quo and were signed to A&M. Swamped with the spicy Hammond organ of Kenny Daughters and rallied in fine fashion by frontman Steve Haynes, Hustler came on like a more colourful, less sensible cousin of Deep Purple. *High Street* (**8/10**) even spawned a minor hit in the shape of the boisterous, rhyming slang-peppered *Get Outa Me 'Ouse* (think the Heavy Metal Kids on a pub crawl with the Small Faces and you'll get the general idea). Elsewhere the Free-like strains of the title track hit the bullseye.

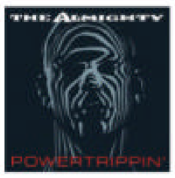
Next album *Play Loud* (**6/10**), produced by Roy Thomas Baker, ramped up the boogie factor, echoing Quo and Foghat. Although the results were mostly impressive, the metamorphosis caused some identity confusion. However, both are well worth a listen.

Dave Ling

The Almighty

Powertrippin' CHERRY RED

Revisiting the glory years of Glasgow's motorcycle punks.



The Almighty rode in on the late-80s biker-metal wave with a pair of gas-guzzling riff orgies – 1990's *Blood Fire And Love* and the following year's *Soul Destruction* – that owed so much to The Cult you could've called 'em *Electric II* and *III*. That suited most of us just fine. But determined to drop the comparisons to Ian Astbury and co., frontman Ricky Warwick whipped up a hard-charging new sound for *Powertrippin'*, one that incorporated their established 80s metal crunch with politically charged punk ferocity and a side dish of grunge ennui.

It was a winning combination, and although it didn't exactly set the charts ablaze it remains The Almighty's high-water mark. Hard 'n' heavy belters like *Possession* and *Takin' Hold* cracked skulls with wild, reckless abandon. It wasn't all breathless bludgeon, though. The band kept things interesting with more radio-friendly pop-grungers like *Sick And Wired* and the power ballad *Jesus Loves You... But I Don't*. Mostly it was about running your face over with motorcycle tyres, though.

Cherry Red's delightful two-disc package is packed with tasty extras, including B-sides (among them a blistering tear through the Pistols' *Bodies*), demos, live tracks, and the never-released title track to *Soul Destruction*. A treasure trove for Almighty faithful.

Sleazegrinder

Whitesnake

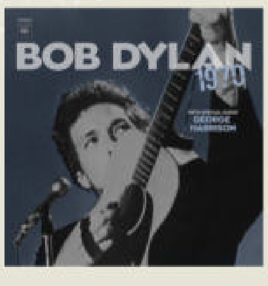
The Blues RHINO

After albums called silver, gold, purple, red and white, David Coverdale completes a weird rainbow.

The third in a remixed and remastered trilogy, following last year's *The Rock Album* and *Love Songs*; although since David Coverdale chose to 'metal up' his approach, whether the band are rockin', lovin' or sufferin', such genres have blurred.

Billed as "the band's best *blues-rock* tracks" (albeit spanning just seven studio releases from 1984-2011), *The Blues* leans on the rock, but three from 1997's *Restless Heart* (*Take Me Back Again, Too Many Tears* and *Woman Trouble Blues*) plus *A Fool In Love* (*Good To Be Bad*, 2008) at least exist in the shadow of the blues. Elsewhere, deep cut *If You Want Me* is only so-so. Best of the bunch is *River Song* from Coverdale's 2000 solo album *Into The Light*, and the 14-track album ends with *Crying In The Rain* from 1987's game-changing *Whitesnake*.

Neil Jeffries



Bob Dylan

The 50th Anniversary Collection 1970

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Previously unreleased tracks suggest that one of Bob's less celebrated years deserves reappraisal.

In 1970, Bob Dylan was unquestionably prolific but seemingly coasting. That year's two knockabout albums – the covers-swamped *Self Portrait* and the self-written *New Morning* – were a conscious step away from the ground-breaking intensity of *Blonde On Blonde*. So comfortable was he as New Bob that not until *Blood On The Tracks*, five years and a marital collapse later, would that intensity be re-kindled.

Yet like all Dylan's coasting periods to come, under the surface there was another tale to be told. The 74 previously unreleased tracks on this clumsily titled collection spread over three CDs include out-takes from both the *Self Portrait* and *New Morning* sessions, and nine tracks recorded with George Harrison. Unsurprisingly, Harrison is a subtle presence, adding mostly background vocals and acoustic guitar. The Everly Brothers would have slept soundly on hearing Bob and George's harmonies on *All I Have To Do Is Dream*, but their ramshackle amble through *Gates Of Eden* (one of several older Dylan tracks revisited here) is unalloyed joy.

Not everything warrants exhumation but, as the Bootleg Series tells us, Dylan was always a flawed judge of his own work.

This treasure trove finds him at his most mischievous and most relaxed, whether countrifying *If Not For You* or almost breaking into *La Bamba* on *Come A Little Bit Closer*. Along the way, he slurs his way through The Beatles' *Yesterday*, tackles traditional fare (a wry *Come All You Fair & Tender Ladies*), rock'n'roll (a rollicking *Matchbox*) and curve-balls, most notably a gorgeous, organ-led *Can't Help Falling In Love*, and *I Met Him On A Sunday (Ronde-Ronde)*, a delightfully daft take on *Da Doo Ron Ron*.

It's tempting to see this incarnation of Dylan as throwaway, but as ever there's grit in the candy floss. A brooding, six-minute *Long Black Veil* is as wizened as anything on *Rough & Rowdy Ways*, there's real pain on *I Threw It All Away*, and *It Ain't Me Babe* swings, but ruefully.

For half a century, 1970 has seemed like a less-essential Dylan year. Now we've been allowed to hear what really happened, that judgement seems harsh. But the key to Dylan remains unchanged: things are never quite what they seem.

John Aizlewood

Rock'n'Roll Sweepstakes

Campbell Devine OMNIBUS

Conscientious second half of epic authorised biography: the ballad of after The Hoople.

After the suits and the platform boots, Ian Hunter went solo. The second leg of Campbell Devine's Brobdingnagian biography tells us the truth, the whole truth, nuthin' but the truth about Hunter's post-Mott The Hoople decades. And there's much to tell. In its 500-plus pages we move from 1975's *Once Bitten Twice Shy*, through his mostly impressive albums, to the Mott reunion and Hunter's sedately increasing stature as a rock icon. He's never made 'national treasure' status, but he's a cult heroes' cult hero.

Hunter couldn't ask for a more diligent, sympathetic Boswell than Devine, whose involvement in many Mott/Hunter reissues and retrospectives has been the polar opposite of perfunctory. An assiduous devotee, he interviews his man in depth. Hunter said of *Volume One*: "The thoroughness is pretty astonishing. It's great for me – I can always have a look and see what I've done." Of equal benefit is the fact that in spells the book takes its tone from *Diary Of A Rock'n'Roll Star*, Hunter's own 1974 book, in not glossing over the anti-glamour of life as a grafter in the music business. If a little hagiographical in places, it also acknowledges the dip across the late 80s and the 90s when record labels were unreliable and Hunter was consistently infuriated by *Melody Maker* calling him "senile". And if it's overzealous in its praise of 2007's *Shrunken Heads* album as a work of peerless genius, it allows that the Mott reunion shows, which triumphed at theatre level, then belly-flopped in soulless arenas.

What is correctly conveyed is that Hunter, often with Mick Ronson, emerged from Mott in the 70s and absolutely delivered, his first few solo albums flying. Underrated 1976 gem *All American Alien Boy* yields good stories regarding jazz bassist Jaco Pastorius and Queen, and later Ronson's 1993 death was clearly a gut-punch. At all times Hunter speaks candidly, shades off, and with linguistic ingenuity: "I think it's difficult for Todd [Rundgren] to get on with anybody because he's got so much brain in his head".

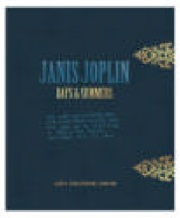
Hunter never made hyperstar level. One theory why could be that he was/is too Dylan for Bowie fans and too Bowie for Dylan fans. "I've never been huge but I've never gone down the tubes either," he says. He's the unique Ian Hunter, justly eulogised here: he knows that rock'n'roll burns, but he's lived and he's learned.

Chris Roberts

Janis Joplin: Days & Summers: Janis Scrapbook, 1966-68

GENESIS

Late singer's collection from when her star was rising.



This is a fan's delight: a giant scrapbook of posters, press cuttings, photographs and artefacts, collected and annotated by Joplin herself, supplemented by a preceding senior high-school years (1956-59) scrapbook and previously unpublished family letters. There are heartfelt and touching intros from Grace Slick and family members, an afterword from Kris Kristofferson, and what amounts to a low-key but very revealing oral history from various members of her band Big Brother and Jefferson Airplane, as well as Mick Fleetwood, Chrissie Hynde, Taj Mahal and more. Great as all that is (and it is), what really makes this book stand out – and it's a true pleasure to browse, to dip into and out of – are the photographs and scrawled notes, the posters and minutiae; the attention to detail.

The 12" x 12" book is limited to 2,000 copies worldwide and comes on heavyweight gilt-edged pages, each copy hand-signed by some of its contributors. The deluxe edition includes a one-off seven-inch single and Grace Slick art print. One to cherish.

Everett True

The Devil's Rhythm

Mark Robertson

LOST SOULS BOOKS

Meteor madness memoirs.

Not exactly poetry, but an essential document for Crazies of a certain age, *The Devil's Rhythm* chronicles the development of early psychobilly from the viewpoint of original Meteors drummer Mark Robertson (aka Markov D Devil). While his tenure with the band was relatively short, it crucially encompassed the trio's early days as dual-vocalist-fronted scene pioneers with enduring guitar stalwart P Paul Fenech complemented by the looming, imposing presence of stand-up bassist Mad Nigel 'Tall Boy' Lewis.

Packed with evocative snaps and vintage press clips, *The Devil's Rhythm* is so redolent of early-80s Meteors moshpits that you'll almost swear you can taste the blood.

Ian Fortnam

Hickory Wind: The Life And Times Of Gram Parsons

Ben Fong Torres

EXTRADITION/CADIZ

High-flying Byrd.

At the beginning of this book there's a description of the death of Gram Parsons. Some 200 pages later there's a more thorough description, in which none of the accounts by those who were at the Joshua Tree Inn tally. That's soon eclipsed by the kidnapping of his body from Los Angeles airport and its return to the Joshua Tree where it was burned – most of it, anyway. What remained was flown to New Orleans and buried by Parsons's stepfather who didn't get the inheritance he was looking for.

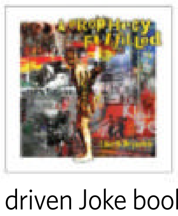
Parsons's drug-addled demise cannot dent his status as the innovator of country rock in The Byrds, the Flying Burrito Brothers and his two solo albums, his influence on the Rolling Stones' *Exile On Main St*, and his legacy, perpetuated chiefly by Emmylou Harris (Parsons's final singing partner) and hundreds of other musicians. In this book the story is researched exhaustively and told unflinchingly.

Hugh Fielder

Killing Joke: A Prophecy Fulfilled

Chris Bryans THIS DAY IN MUSIC

Band-approved coffee-table fan book.



Like Jyrki Hamalainen's *Are You Receiving?*, this second fan-driven Joke book has its heart in the right place and will please diehard fans willing to fork out 40 quid for This Day In Music's *I was there* format upgraded to hard-back coffee-table size with increased memorabilia, selfies and snapshots (1977 Youth in The Rage is priceless).

There's a foreword from Faith No More bassist Bill Gould, and band quotes are routinely dwarfed by fan memories, producer/engineer recording

DENNIS DIBRIZZI/PRESS

accounts taking precedence over inner-circle figures.

After the initial phase skims through to 1982's Iceland incident (somewhat glossed over from different perspectives), Youth's 90s-rescuing Goa set-up gives way to Chris Connelly and US factions, before the 21st century enjoys more detailed embroidery, with a nice tribute to late bassist Raven.

A sterling effort that still leaves the gate open for the definitive magnum opus.

Kris Needs

Rock Saws

Various Artists *ZEE PRODUCTIONS*

Getting jiggy with Queen, AC/DC and more.

When pandemics and precipitation have put paid to outdoor pursuits, we've all had a glimpse into the yawning void of boredom. So what better time to rediscover the timeless reliability of a jigsaw puzzle for a challenging diversion? But no need to reach for that dusty *Hay Wain* or eye-watering Alpine snow scene on top of the wardrobe, because Rock Saws have re-imagined your favourite album covers as 500- and 1,000-piece puzzles. Classic sleeves await the discerning modern dissectologist. The elegant but band-massacring sci-fi robot painted by Frank Kelly Freas that fronts Queen's *News Of The World* can once again be pored over and re-created piece by piece, and who wouldn't indulge in their own front-room festival of AC/DC when piecing together the cover of *Highway To Hell*?

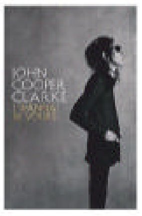
Both a tantalising new challenge, and a familiar friend to brighten your mood during grey times.

Petrina McFarlane

I Wanna Be Yours

John Cooper Clarke *PICADOR*

The ballad of a thin man.



Being as how Dr JCC remains the punk generation's favourite performance poet (not exactly leading a packed field of contenders, but I'm sure you catch my drift), we're all familiar with his dulcet tones, either from the gob-flecked stages of our flaming youth or his countless subsequent media appearances (from second billing to the Honey Monster in Sugar Puffs ads to Olympic-standard mithering on *Have I Got News For You*). So fully immersing oneself in this, his first volume of autobiography, is a cinch because you can easily imagine its every beautifully crafted quip delivered in the beloved Bard's rich and fruity Salford brogue.

Even when stripped of masterfully deployed, dramatically elongated, mercilessly flattened vowels, John Cooper Clarke's prose is irresistibly entertaining. He paints characters and situations with a master's touch (somewhere between Dickens and Dawson) and every page is a delight. From the obsessively described cultural ephemera of his youth, through a bumpy passage through musically immersed mod-era adolescence, unlikely punk near-celebrity and chemical dependency to ultimate recovery. Everything you need know about an utterly unique national treasure, brilliantly told and invariably wryly comic.

Ian Fortnam

The Lyrics Of Syd Barrett

OMNIBUS PRESS

Words from Pink Floyd founder/genius.

Pink Floyd founder Syd Barrett's lyrics were never printed officially during his lifetime. This slim, charming volume – framed by introductions from former Pink Floyd manager Peter Jenner and Barrett biographer Rob Chapman, and carefully curated photographs – sets this right.

The pleasure to be had from reading these often disarmingly simple and quintessentially English, beautifully psychedelic and odd couplets is considerable. Who can resist the pathways offered by '*Arnold Layne had a strange hobby/Collecting clothes, moonshine, washing line*'?

As Chapman writes: "Syd's songs often present a sense of the unknowable. The narrative flow seems arbitrary and inexplicable. The lyrics frequently lack specifics. They trigger multiple associations in the mind and suggest myriad meanings which they do not ultimately reveal."

That was the appeal.

As Syd put it: '*Blinding signs flap/Flicker, flicker, flicker blam, pow pow/Stairway scared, Dan Dare who's there?*' (*Astronomy Dominie*').

Everett True

THE BRAIN TUMOUR CHARITY
A CURE CAN'T WAIT

STAND WITH US, GIVE HOPE THIS WINTER!

Together we can save more lives

"Before Laura's diagnosis, none of us knew anything about brain tumours or how little is spent on research into this disease compared with many other cancers.

– Nicola Nuttall, Laura's mum

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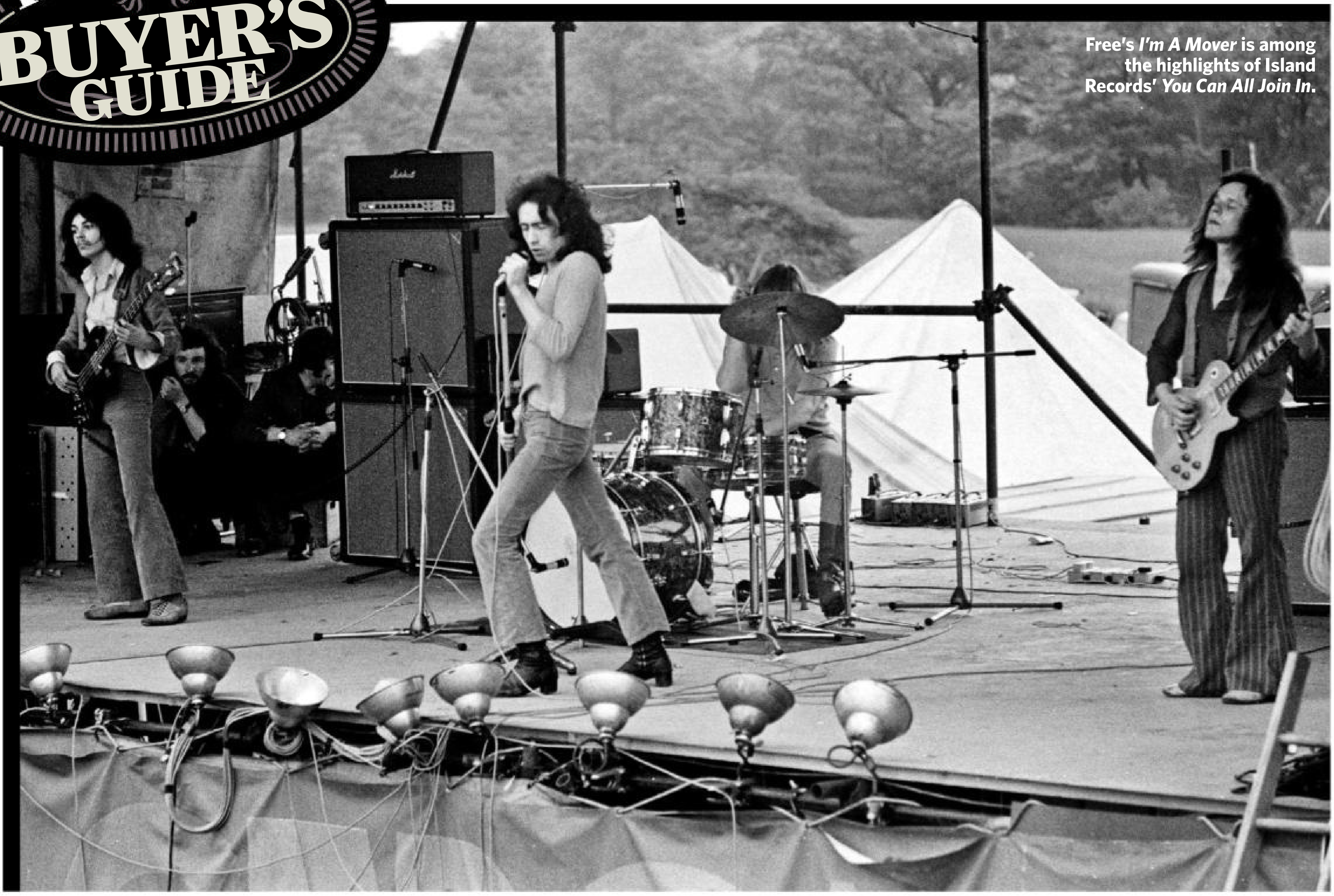
THE HARD STUFF BUYER'S GUIDE



Free's *I'm A Mover* is among the highlights of Island Records' *You Can All Join In*.

60s/70s Samplers

These label shop windows were a new-music lifeline for fans, and helped launch the careers of many future stars.

It's all around you, as much as you desire, on the radio, TV, countless digital platforms and other means of delivery. It goes with you on your phone, iPod, laptop and tablet. You're bombarded with it in shops, pubs, bars, restaurants, cafés and on call-hold. These days music is everywhere, whether you want to hear it or not, to the point where it can be hard to get away from it.

But it wasn't always like that. Up until Radio 1 launched in 1967 and opened the doors wider and gave easier access, and later launched shows by hugely infuential DJs such as John Peel, Mike Raven and Alan 'Fluff' Freeman, if you wanted to discover new music, even the most popular stuff, you had to make an effort. Such as spending your late evenings with a finger on the radio dial, constantly tuning in to 'drifting' frequencies of the pirate radio stations that were a precious lifeline to music that was new and exciting.

If your taste was a little more eclectic and went beyond what was likely to figure in the Hit Parade (now know as the charts), then you *really* had to make the effort. Friends would gather together at someone's house to listen intently to each other's latest album purchase. You'd spend hours flicking through album sleeves in your local record shop, looking for sleeves that might offer some indication that the music inside might be worth hearing, and then ask if you could listen to it in one of the shop's listening booths. Or if you got to know the person who worked on the record counter at Woolworth's you could spend a few Saturday-afternoon hours there listening to your requests, before the manager came along and told them to play something "a bit nicer".

When 'samplers' – record labels' budget-priced try-before-you-buy compilations of tracks from a range of artists on their label – came along at the end of the 60s, to music fans thirsty for something new they were affordable treasure troves. Samplers were many people's introduction t what became their favourite artists. In many cases they were also a significant factor in some of those artists going on to become established stars. Some of the artists were already stars, and tracks from them might be included so that punters weren't shooting in complete darkness. Often their track-listing varied wildly in musical style, but then that was part of the point: to deliver a wide range of new music, in the hope that an artist flicked your switch and you went on to buy more by them. Of course it's impossible to say how much they helped careers. But it's also possible that without samplers some artists who went on to have long, hugely successful careers might not have got further than that difficult second album.

Paul Henderson

Essential Classics

You Can All Join In

Island *1969*

More than just a showcase for some of the newer/lesser-known signings (alongside a couple of established artists) to Island Records, that label's first sampler showed just how good samplers could be, and would carry some weight as a 'regular' compilation album. With highlights including Free's *I'm A Mover*, Jethro Tull's *A Song For Jeffrey*, Fairport Convention's exquisite *Meet On The Ledge* and Art's *What's That Sound* (a renamed cover of Buffalo Springfield's *For What It's Worth*), this early sampler thankfully set a high-bar for those that followed, and it's arguable that few, if any, really bettered it.

The Rock Machine Turns You On

CBS *1968*

The one that started the sampler ball rolling, and it did what the title says; this album was the first step to many people being turned on to previously unknown, mostly American artists by great tracks such as Spirit's *Fresh Garbage*, Blood, Sweat & Tears' brassy *My Days Are Numbered*, Moby Grape's up-tempo shuffle *Can't Be So Bad* and Taj Mahal's laid-back slide-driven *Statesboro Blues*. Those four alone are worth the price of admission. Familiar names such as Bob Dylan, The Byrds, The Zombies and Simon And Garfunkel provided a safe haven for those unsure about exploring unfamiliar territory.

GETTY

Superior Reputation cementing

The Age Of Atlantic

Atlantic *1970*

The bigger the label, the bigger the artists and the more diverse the roster to choose from. In the 60s/70s, Atlantic was one of the biggest, and were able to have Led Zeppelin (*Whole Lotta Love, Communication Breakdown*), Delaney & Bonnie's Clapton-enhanced hit *Comin' Home*, MC5 thumper *Tonight* and Yes (*Survival*) among the carrots dangled to entice record buyers to cock an ear to then lesser-known, artists. Among these, Iron Butterfly, Dr John the Allman Brothers Band (the excellent *Black Hearted Woman*), and Vanilla Fudge all offer something worthwhile.

Fill Your Head With Rock

CBS *1970*

Given CBS's roster, it's no wonder they were able to muster a star-spangled double sampler with enough top-drawer class – Santana (*Savour*), Chicago (*Listen*), The Byrds (*Gunga Din*), Johnny Winter (*I Love Everybody*), Leonard Cohen (*You Know Who I Am*), Argent (*Dance In The Smoke*), Taj Mahal (*Six Days On The Road*) – that the supporting cast almost doesn't matter. But it does, and the likes of Black Widow (*Come To The Sabbat*), Skin Alley (*Living In Sin*), Steamhammer (*Passing Through*) are evidence that making it big depended on so much more than just making great music.

Nice Enough To Eat

Island *1969*

The success of *You Can All Join In* gave Island good reason to follow it quickly with another, and perhaps also the confidence to go for a stylistically broader track-listing. At one end there's Dr. Strangely Strange's hippies-on-a-log 'la-la-la' acoustic singalong *Strangely Strange But Oddly Normal* and Nick Drake's waltz-time float-away *Time Has Told Me*), at the other the in-your-face blast of King Crimson's *21st Century Schizoid Man* and the Eastern vibes of Quintessence's *Gungamai*. In between, Tull's *We Used To Know* and Blodwyn Pig's stop-go *Sing Me A Song That I Know* are among the highlights.

Rock Machine I Love You

CBS *1968*

For their second *Rock Machine* volume, CBS came up with another collection of familiar names mixed with outside-lane punts they hoped would turn you on. The Byrds' California dreamer *You Ain't Goin' Nowhere*, Simon & Garfunkel's glorious *America* and Big Brother And The Holding Company's bar-room tinkler *Turtle Blues* are the cherries topping a layer cake including Grace Slick And The Great Society's original *Somebody To Love*, Blood, Sweat & Tears' funky-brass *More And More* and Wendy Carlos's all-synths *Brandenburg Concerto No 3 in G Major*.

Good Worth exploring

The Vertigo Annual

Vertigo *1970*

One of lesser-known and more out-and-out rock samplers of the period, this mostly British collection is notable for the strength of the tracks by some of its lesser-known artists. Best of that bunch are the gloriously fuzzed-Hammond-driven *Introduction* by lost-in-action proggers Gracious, Cressida's excellent waltz-away *To Play Your Little Game* and especially Affinity's brilliant *Three Sisters*. The big names here include Black Sabbath (*Behind The Wall Of Sleep*) Uriah Heep (*Gypsy*), Manfred Mann Chapter Three (*One Way Glass*) and Rod Stewart (*Handbags And Gladrags*), but by no means do they steal the show.

Charisma Festival

Charisma *1977*

One for prog-leaning fans with a broad musical taste, this has a 'family'-feel track-listing that includes Genesis and their offspring Peter Gabriel and Steve Hackett and second cousin Brand X, Van Der Graaf Generator and their breadwinner Peter Hammill, Hawkwind, The Nice, Patrick Moraz and Lindisfarne among the better-known names on board. That broad musical taste will be helpful when the needle hits the grooves of tracks by Rare Bird, Clifford T Ward, String Driven Thing and Paul Ryan. A double album with two tracks apiece from most of the artists, but for some of them the song selection could have been a bit better.

Suck It And See

Vertigo *1973*

Another fine, weighty collection from the swirly label that you can enjoy watching spinning while listening to the music from names already familiar to the rock audience, including Black Sabbath's *Children Of The Grave*) Status Quo's *Don't Waste My Time*, the Sensational Alex Harvey Band's *Jungle Jenny* and Manfred Mann's Earth Band's *Buddah*. You can also get a taste of what muso prog sounds like with Gentle Giant's *Boys In The Band*, and get a feel for the burgeoning electronica via Kraftwerk's *Ruckzuck*. A strong and safe supporting cast includes Jim Croce, the Spencer Davis Group, Rod Stewart, Ian Matthews and Jackson Heights.

Picnic (A Breath Of Fresh Air)

Harvest *1970*

The progressive-inclined imprint of British major-player major label EMI, Harvest was at the time home to home-grown artists including Pink Floyd, Roy Harper, Deep Purple, Barclay James Harvest and R&B bruisers The Pretty Things. All those make their mark on this double album with less obvious tracks (e.g. Floyd with *Embryo*, Purple with *Into The Fire*), but they're given a run for their money by top tunes from comparatively in-the-shadows artists here like Kevin Ayers (*Eleanor's Cake Which Ate Her*), the Battered Ornaments (*Twisted Track*) and Quatermass (*Black Sheep Of The Family*).

Essential Playlist

I'm A Mover
Free

Communication Breakdown
Led Zeppelin

21st Century Schizoid Man
King Crimson

Meet On The Ledge
Fairport Convention

A Song For Jeffrey
Jethro Tull

Sing Me A Song That I Know
Blodwyn Pig

Time Has Told Me
Nick Drake

You Ain't Goin' Nowhere
The Byrds

Squonk
Genesis

Dance In The Smoke
Argent

My Days Are Numbered
Blood, Sweat & Tears

The Zombies
Time Of The Season

Comin' Home
Delaney & Bonnie

Tonight
MC5

Fresh Garbage
Spirit

Statesboro Blues
Taj Mahal

America
Simon And Garfunkel

Handbags And Gladrags
Rod Stewart

DAY 1
SOLID Entertainments presents
STRAY
SKARLETT RIOT
SKAM
ANCHOR LANE
FALSE HEARTS
WHITE RAVEN DOWN
CLEETHORPES Rocks
CLEETHORPES BEACHCOMBER
SATURDAY 3RD JULY 2021
2.00PM - 10.30PM
EARLY BIRD TICKET £19 NOW ON SALE
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FACE VALUE TICKET (NO BOOKING FEE)
01472 349222 (MONDAYS 9AM - 5PM)
gigantic See PERSONAL CALLERS : GRIMSBY SOLID ENTERTAINMENTS & REPLAY RECORDS.

DAY 2
SOLID Entertainments presents
CHANTEL McGREGOR
VAMBO
JOANOVARC
SCARLET REBELS
GORILLA RIOT
LOZ CAMPBELL
CLEETHORPES Rocks
CLEETHORPES BEACHCOMBER
SUNDAY 4TH JULY 2021
2.00PM - 10.00PM
EARLY BIRD TICKET £19 NOW ON SALE
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SOLID Entertainments presents
CHANTEL McGREGOR
UK TOUR 2021
2021
FRI 02 APR GRIMSBY YARDBIRDS CLUB (SOLO ACOUSTIC)
FRI 30 APR STAMFORD MAMA LIZ'S (SOLO ACOUSTIC)
FRI 21 MAY KEIGHLEY STUDIO 5
THU 27 MAY BILSTON ROBIN 2
FRI 28 MAY LONDON 100 CLUB
SAT 29 MAY WORTHING THE FACTORY
SUN 30 MAY SOUTHAMPTON 1865
FRI 04 JUN DONCASTER THE LEOPARD
FRI 11 JUN BARTON UPON HUMBER THE ROPEWALK
THU 17 JUN KINROSS THE GREEN HOTEL
FRI 18 JUN GLASGOW HARD ROCK CAFE
SAT 19 JUN ABERDEEN CAFE DRUMMOND
SUN 20 JUN EDINBURGH BANNERMANS
MON 21 JUN NEWCASTLE THE CLUNY
SUN 04 JUL CLEETHORPES ROCKS
FRI 13 AUG RUISLIP TROPIC
FRI 15 OCT SHEFFIELD GREYSTONES
FRI 22 OCT MORECAMBE THE PLATFORM
SAT 13 NOV HULL ADELPHI
SAT 04 DEC LOOE BLUES RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
SUN 05 DEC TAVISTOCK WHARF
THU 09 DEC DERBY FLOWERPOT
ONLINE: WWW.SOLIDENTERTAINMENTS.COM
gigantic See EACH VENUE AND ALL USUAL AGENTS
CHANTELMCGREGOR.COM
PHOTO BY KEITH NEWHOUSE

SOLID Entertainments presents...
JUNE 2021
WED 09 LONDON 100 CLUB
FRI 11 DONCASTER THE LEOPARD
SAT 12 GRIMSBY YARDBIRDS CLUB
MAN
FOCUS
2021
THU 27 MAY LONDON UNDER THE BRIDGE
THU 17 JUN WHITBY PAVILION
STEPHEN DALE PETIT
2021
FRI 09 JUL LONDON 100 CLUB
SAT 06 NOV BUDE BLUES RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
BIG COUNTRY
2021
SAT 31 JUL CLEETHORPES ROCKS FOR NHS
FRI 06 AUG WHITBY PAVILION THEATRE
SAT 14 AUG DONCASTER THE DOME
2021 NOVEMBER
THU 11 GREAT YARMOUTH HRH BLUES FESTIVAL
SAT 13 EDINBURGH BANNERMANS
SUN 14 KINROSS GREEN HOTEL
TUE 16 LONDON 100 CLUB
CORKY LAING PLAYS MOUNTAIN
BB KING BLUES BAND
FRIDAY 17TH DECEMBER 2021
LONDON UNDER THE BRIDGE
TICKETS NOW ON SALE WWW.SOLIDENTERTAINMENTS.COM

Tour Dates

2000 TREES FESTIVAL
JIMMY EAT WORLD, THRICE, CREEPER, MORE

Cheltenham	Upcote Farm	Jul 8-10

BRYAN ADAMS

Bristol	City Centre	Jun 26
Cardiff	Castle	Jun 27
Scarborough	Open Air Theatre	Jul 1
Widnes	Halton Stadium	Jul 2
Telford	QEII Arena	Jul 3
Cornwall	Eden Project	Jul 5
Powderham	Castle	Jul 6
Canterbury	Spitfire Ground	Jul 8
Cornbury	Music Festival	Jul 9
Leeds	Harewood House	Jul 10

AEROSMITH, RIVAL SONS

London	O2 Arena	Jun 23
Manchester	Arena	Jun 29
Sheffield	FlyDSA Arena	Jul 2

THE ALLMAN BETTS BAND

Cardiff	Globe	May 7
London	Highbury Garage	May 8
Manchester	Academy	May 9
Glasgow	St Luke's Church	May 11

ALL THEM WITCHES

Brighton	Chalk	Sep 27
Nottingham	Bodega	Sep 28
Glasgow	St Luke's Church	Sep 29
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Sep 30
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	Oct 1

IAN ANDERSON: JETHRO TULL'S THE PROG YEARS

Bath	Forum	Sep 17
Reading	Hexagon	Sep 18
Aylesbury	Waterside	Sep 20
Leicester	De Montfort Hall	Sep 21
Brighton	Dome	Sep 22
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Sep 24
Poole	Lighthouse	Sep 25
Perth	Concert Hall	Sep 27
Glasgow	Pavilion Theatre	Sep 28
Hanley	Victoria Hall	Sep 29
Blackburn	King George's Hall	Sep 30

A NEW DAY FESTIVAL
JOHN LEES' BARCLAY JAMES HARVEST, THE CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN, MORE

Faversham	Mount Ephraim Gardens	Aug 20-22

ARCTANGENT FESTIVAL
OPETH, CULT OF LUNA, SWANS, MORE

Bristol	Fernhill Farm	Aug 19-21

RUSS BALLARD

London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Apr 21

MARTIN BARRE BAND

Wakefield	Warehouse 23	May 29
Durham	Northern Kin Festival	May 30
York	The Crescent	Jun 3
Carlisle	Old Fire Station	Jun 5
Bilston	Robin 2	Jun 6
Hull	O'Rileys	Jun 11
Crickhowell	Clarence Hall	Jun 11

BAUHAUS

London	Alexandra Palace	Jun 3

BIG COUNTRY

Cleethorpes	Rock For NHS Festival	Jul 31
Whitby	Pavilion	Aug 6
Doncaster	Dome	Aug 14

BILSTON BLUES FESTIVAL
THE ANIMALS, KYLA BROX, MORE

Bilston	Robin 2	Aug 29

BINGLEY WEEKENDER
PIXIES, PRIMAL SCREAM, THE LIBERTINES, MORE

Bradford & Bingley	Rugby Club	Aug 6-8

THE BLACK CROWES

London	Brixton Academy	Oct 23, 24
Manchester	Apollo	Oct 26

BIFFY CLYRO

Liverpool	Mountford Hall	Apr 11
London	Kentish Town Forum	Apr 12
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Apr 13
Sheffield	Academy	Apr 15
Southampton	Guildhall	Apr 16
Bristol	Academy	Apr 17

BILSTON BLUES FESTIVAL
THE ANIMALS, KRIS BARRAS, KYLA BROX

Bilston	Robin 2	Aug 29

BLACK DEER FESTIVAL
SAVING GRACE FEATURING ROBERT PLANT & SUZI DIAN, WILKO, THE WATERBOYS, MORE

Kent	Eridge Park	Jun 18-20

BLACK STONE CHERRY, KRIS BARRAS BAND

Bristol	Academy	Sep 9
Birmingham	Academy	Sep 10
Lincoln	Engine Shed	Sep 11
Nottingham	Rock City	Sep 13
Leeds	Academy	Sep 14
Manchester	Apollo	Sep 16
Glasgow	Barrowland	Sep 17
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	Sep 18
Newcastle	Academy	Sep 20
Liverpool	Academy	Sep 21
Folkestone	Leas Cliff Hall	Sep 23
Cardiff	St David's Hall	Sep 24
Exeter	Great Hall	Sep 25
Southampton	Guildhall	Sep 27
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Sep 28

BLACKWATER CONSPIRACY, THESE WICKED RIVERS

Liverpool	Arts Club	Sep 8
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Sep 9
Glasgow	Hard Rock Café	Sep 10
Carlisle	Brickyard	Sep 11
Newcastle	Trillians	Sep 12
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Sep 14
Leeds	Warehouse	Sep 15
Oxford	Academy 2	Sep 16
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Sep 17
Newport	The Patriot	Sep 18
Sheffield	Corporation	Sep 19
Leicester	The Musician	Sep 21
Birmingham	Academy 3	Sep 23
Gravesend	Red Lion	Sep 24
Swansea	Patti Pavilion	Sep 25
London	Islington Academy 2	Sep 26
Belfast	Empire	Oct 22
Dublin	Whelans	Oct 24

BLOODSTOCK FESTIVAL
JUDAS PRIEST, MERCYFUL FATE, DEVIN TOWNSEND, MORE

Derbyshire	Catton Park	Aug 11-15

BRING ME THE HORIZON

Glasgow	The Hydro	Sep 21
Cardiff	Motorpoint Arena	Sep 22
Sheffield	FlyDSA Arena	Sep 24
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Sep 25
London	O2 Arena	Sep 26

Recommended

BROTHERS OSBORNE

Birmingham	Institute	May 10
Edinburgh	Queen's Hall	May 11
Cambridge	Junction	May 13
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	May 14
Leeds	Academy	May 16
Manchester	Albert Hall	May 17

TO BE RETAINED ISSUED SUBJECT TO THE CONDITIONS ON BACK

BURY ST EDMUNDS BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
THE ANIMALS, KRIS BARRAS, KYLA BROX BAND

Bury St Edmunds	The Apex	Aug 28

CALL OF THE WILD FESTIVAL
PHIL CAMPBELL & THE BASTARD SONS, MASSIVE WAGONS, WARRIOR SOUL, MORE

Lincoln	Lincolnshire Showground	Sep 18-20

CAMBRIDGE ROCK FESTIVAL
FOCUS, CATS IN SPACE, ATOMIC ROOSTER, MORE

Peterborough	East Of England Showground	Jun 17-20

CARAVAN

Hampton	Pool	Jul 3
Basingstoke	Haymarket	Oct 6
London	Highbury Union Chapel	Oct 7
Gloucester	Guild Hall	Oct 8
Brighton	Old Market	Oct 9
Chester	Live Rooms	Oct 14
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Oct 15
Bury	The Met	Oct 16
Bilston	Robin 2	Oct 17
Bury St Edmunds	Apex	Oct 21
Newcastle	The Cluny	Oct 22
Glasgow	Oran Mor	Oct 23
Bristol	The Fleece	Oct 27
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Oct 28
Dover	Booking Hall	Oct 29

CLASSIC ROCK RECOMMENDS

THE BLACK CROWES

Finding lockdown hard to handle? Relax! Put this in your diary and practise shaking your money maker to their groovy tunes.

See below for dates. Currently October 23, 24, 26.

CATS IN SPACE

Reading	Sub 89	Jun 17
Cambridge	Rock Festival	Jun 18
Lancaster	Grand Theatre	Aug 26
Nottingham	Stonedead Festival	Aug 27
Bilston	Robin 2	Sep 2
Wavendon	The Stables	Sep 3
Hexham	Queens Hall	Sep 9
Sheffield	Rockin' The Bowl Festival	Sep 10
Norwich	Epic Studios	Sep 15
Southampton	Engine Rooms	Sep 16
Brighton	Concorde 2	Sep 23
London	Highbury Garage	Oct 2

CHEAP TRICK (2022)

Newcastle	Boiler Shop	Feb 1
Manchester	Academy	Feb 2
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Feb 4
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Feb 5
Bristol	Academy	Feb 6

CHELSEA BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
CHRIS FARLOWE, CLIMAX BLUES BAND, MORE

London	Chelsea Under The Bridge	July 10

ERIC CLAPTON

London	Royal Albert Hall	May 14, 15, 17, 18

CLEETHORPES BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
THE ANIMALS & FRIENDS, THE BLOCKHEADS, MORE

Cleethorpes	Beachcomber	Jun 19

CLEETHORPES ROCKS
MAN, CHANTEL McGREGOR, THESE WICKED RIVERS, MORE

Cleethorpes	Moon On The Water	Sep 19, 20

CORNWALL ROCKS
THE WILDHEARTS, PRAYING MANTIS, FOCUS, MORE

Looe	Tencreek Holiday Park	Oct 15-17

CORROSION OF CONFORMITY

Dublin	Academy	Apr 24
Belfast	Limelight 2	Apr 25
Glasgow	Garage	Apr 27
Manchester	Club Academy	Apr 28
Southampton	Engine Rooms	May 21
Birmingham	Institute 2	May 22

THE CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN

Sale	Waterside Arts	May 27
Whitley Bay	Playhouse	May 28
Swindon	Wyvern Theatre	Jun 3
London	Shepherd's Bush Bush Hall	Jun 4
Leeds	City Varieties	Jun 10
Lowestoft	Marina Theatre	Jun 11
Tewkesbury	Roses Theatre	Jun 12

CROPREDY FESTIVAL
STEVE HACKETT, CLANNAD, TREVOR HORN, MORE

Oxfordshire	Cropredy Village	Aug 12-14

THE DAMNED

London	Hammersmith Apollo	Jul 9, 10
Birmingham	Academy	Jul 16
Glasgow	Academy	July 17
Manchester	Apollo	Jul 18

DANKO JONES

Bristol	Thekla	Dec 6
Newcastle	Cluny	Dec 7
Glasgow	King Tut's Wah Wah Hut	Dec 8
Nottingham	Bodega Social Club	Dec 9
Manchester	Rebellion	Dec 10
London	Camden Underworld	Dec 11

DEEP PURPLE, BLUE ÖYSTER CULT

Manchester	Arena	Oct 2
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Oct 3
Glasgow	The Hydro	Oct 5
London	O2 Arena	Oct 7
Birmingham	Arena	Oct 8

DIAMOND HEAD, ROCK GODDESS

Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Apr 22
Bournemouth	Madding Crowd	Apr 23
Chester	Live Rooms	Apr 24
Swansea	Patti Pavilion	Apr 25
Cambridge	Junction	Apr 27
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Apr 28
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Apr 30
Newcastle	The Cluny	May 5
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	May 6
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	May 7
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	May 8

REBECCA DOWNES, MOJO PREACHERS

London	Oxford Street 100 Club	May 25

DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL
KISS, MEGADETH, BIFFY CLYRO, MORE

Leicestershire	Donington Park	Jun 4-6

EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN

London	Kentish Town Forum	Sep 9

ENSLAVED, INTRONAUT, OBSIDIAN KINGDOM, CROWN

Birmingham	Institute 2	May 12
Glasgow	Slay	May 13
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	May 14
London	Gt Portland Street 229 Club	May 15

ESOTERICA

Bournemouth	The Anvil	Apr 1
Birmingham	Actress & Bishop	Apr 2
Manchester	Deaf Institute	Apr 3
London	Camden Black Heart	Apr 9
London	Camden Underworld	Apr 10

EVANESCENCE, WITHIN TEMPTATION

Glasgow	The Hydro	Sep 30
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Oct 1

KEVIN NIXON

LIVE!

Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Oct 3
London	O2 Arena	Oct 4

EVERGREY, WITHERFALL, DUST IN MIND

London	Gt Portland Street 229 Club	Oct 9
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Oct 10
Bristol	The Fleece	Oct 11
Manchester	Academy 3	Oct 12
Newcastle	St Dom's Social Club	Oct 13
Glasgow	Cathouse	Oct 14
Dublin	Voodoo Lounge	Oct 15
Birmingham	Asylum 2	Oct 16

Recommended

FAITH NO MORE

Manchester	Apollo	Jun 7, 8
Glasgow	Academy	Jun 9
Birmingham	Academy	Jun 11
London	Brixton Academy	Jun 12, 13

TO BE RETAINED ISSUED SUBJECT TO THE CONDITIONS ON BACK

THE FLAMING LIPS

Galway	Big Top	Jul 17
Liverpool	Invisible Wind Factory	Jul 19
Aylesbury	Waterside Theatre	Jul 21
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Jul 25

FOCUS

London	Chelsea Under The Bridge	May 27
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	May 28
Durham	Northern Kin Festival	May 29
Gateshead	The Sage	Jun 16
Whitby	Pavilion	Jun 17
Gloucester	Guildhall	Jun 18
Cambridge	Rock Festival	Jun 19
Wavendon	The Stables	Jun 20
Faversham	A New Day Festival	Aug 21

FUTURAMA FEST
PETER HOOK, THEATRE OF HATE, CHAMELEONS, MORE

Liverpool	[Various venues]	Apr 3, 4

GENESIS

Dublin	3 Arena	Sep 15, 16
Belfast	SSE Arena	Sep 18
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Sep 20, 21
Manchester	Arena	Sep 24, 25
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Sep 27, 28
Newcastle	Utilita Arena	Sep 30, Oct 1
Liverpool	M&S Bank Arena	Oct 3, 4
Glasgow	The Hydro	Oct 7, 8
London	O2 Arena	Apr 11-13

GRAND SLAM, STARSEED

Bilston	Robin 2	Oct 7
Bradford	Night Train	Oct 8
Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	Oct 14
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Oct 15
Glasgow	Cathouse	Oct 16
Newcastle	Trillians	Oct 17
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Oct 20
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Oct 21
Swansea	Hangar 18	Oct 22
London	Tufnell Park Dome	Oct 23

GREEN DAY

London	London Stadium	Jun 25
Huddersfield	John Smiths Stadium	Jun 26
Glasgow	Green	Jun 28
Dublin	RDS Arena	Jun 30

GUN

Cambridge	Portland Arms	Sep 13
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Sep 14
Cardiff	The Globe	Sep 15
Manchester	Night People	Sep 16
Keighley	Studio 5 Live	Sep 17
Newcastle	The Cluny	Sep 18

GUNS N' ROSES

London	Tottenham Hotspur Stadium	Jun 18, 19
Dublin	Marlay Park	Jun 22
Glasgow	Bellahouston Park	Jun 24

HAWKLORDS

Bedford	Esquires	Oct 14
Hastings	Black Market VIP	Oct 15
Bournemouth	Madding Crowd	Oct 16
Cornwall	Rocks Festival	Oct 17

H.E.A.T, VEGA, MASON HILL, COLLATERAL

Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Oct 7
Leeds	Warehouse	Oct 8
Swansea	Patti Pavilion	Oct 10
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Oct 11
London	Camden Electric Brixton	Oct 12

HELLOWEEN, DIRKSCHNEIDER

Manchester	Academy	May 22
London	Brixton Academy	May 23

HERETIC FEST
INGLORIOUS, AARON BUCHANAN, RAVENEYE, MORE

Sheffield	Corporation	Apr 30-May 2

HOLLYWOOD VAMPIRES, KILLING JOKE

Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Aug 5
Leeds	First Direct Arena	Aug 6
Glasgow	Hydro	Aug 7
London	O2 Arena	Aug 9

INGLORIOUS, MERCUTIO

Southampton	Engine Rooms	Apr 22
Swansea	Sin City	Apr 23
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Apr 24
Plymouth	Junction	Apr 25
Gloucester	Guildhall	Apr 27
Bristol	Thekla	Apr 28
Sheffield	Heretic Fest	Apr 30
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	May 1
Bradford	Nightrain	May 2
Glasgow	Cathouse	May 4
Newcastle	Riverside	May 5
Manchester	Academy	May 6
Buckley	Tivoli	May 7
Liverpool	Arts Loft	May 9
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	May 10
Newcastle	Rock City	May 11
Stoke-on-Trent	Sugarmill	May 12
Birmingham	The Asylum	May 14
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	May 15
Norwich	Waterfront	May 16
Brighton	Chalk	May 18
London	Malet Street ULU	May 19

IQ

London	Islington Assembly Hall	Sep 4
London	Gt Portland Street 229 Club	Dec 10

ROBERT JON & THE WRECK

Cardiff	Globe	Sep 16
Sittingbourne	Bourne Music Club	Sep 17
Chester	Live Rooms	Sep 18
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Sep 19
Newcastle	The Cluny	Sep 20
Manchester	Night & Day Café	Sep 21
Nottingham	Bodega	Sep 22
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Sep 23
Edinburgh	Voodoo Rooms	Sep 24
Aberdeen	Drummonds	Sep 25
Hartlepool	Durham Steel Works Club	Sep 26

KANSAS

London	Palladium	Nov 4

KARNIVOOL

Birmingham	Institute	Sep 25
Leeds	Stylus	Sep 26
Glasgow	Garage	Sep 27
Manchester	Academy 2	Sep 29
London	Kentish Town Forum	Sep 30
Bristol	SWX	Oct 1

CORKY LAING PLAYS MOUNTAIN

Great Yarmouth	HRH Blues Festival	Nov 11
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Nov 13
Kinross	Green Hotel	Nov 14
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Nov 16

THE LAST INTERNATIONALE

Stourport	Workman's Club	Jun 1
Manchester	Night People	Oct 23
Bristol	The Exchange	Oct 24
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Oct 25
Glasgow	Stereo	Oct 26
Birmingham	Hare & Hounds	Oct 27
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Oct 28

LEEDS BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
DR FEELGOOD, KRIS BARRAS, FÉLIX RABIN, MORE

Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	May 9

LINCOLN BLUES FESTIVAL
DR FEELGOOD, KRIS BARRAS, BIG DADDY WILSON, MORE

Lincoln	Drill Hall	May 8

LONDON ROCKS
KEN PULSTENIK'S GROUNDHOGS, JOHN VERITY BAND, XANDER & THE PEACE PIRATES

London	Oxford Street 100 Club	May 21

MAGNUM

Nottingham	Rock City	Sep 16
Sheffield	Leadmill	Sep 17
Norwich	Waterfront	Sep 19
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Sep 20
Southampton	Engine Rooms	Sep 21
Cardiff	Tramshed	Sep 22
Manchester	Academy 2	Sep 24
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Sep 25
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Sep 27

CLASSIC ROCK RECOMMENDS

THE CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN

'I am the God Of Hellfire, and I bring you...' smokin' tunes, entertainment and of course that red-hot hit.

See previous page for dates. Currently May 27 to June 12.

Cambridge	Junction	Sep 29
Glasgow	Garage	Sep 30
Dublin	Voodoo Lounge	Oct 2
Belfast	Limelight 1	Oct 3

MAN

London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Jun 9
Doncaster	The Leopard	Jun 11
Grimsby	Rocks	Jun 12

MANIC STREET PREACHERS

Cardiff	Motorpoint Arena	Jul 16, 17

MARILLION

Hull	City Hall	Nov 14
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	Nov 15
Cardiff	St David's Hall	Nov 17
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Nov 18
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Nov 20
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Nov 21
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	Nov 23
Bath	Forum	Nov 24
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Nov 26, 27

MASSIVE WAGONS, THE LAZYS

London	Islington Academy	Sep 11
Sheffield	Rockin' The Bowl	Sep 12
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Sep 13
Southampton	Engine Rooms	Sep 15
Exeter	Cavern Club	Sep 17
Birmingham	Academy 2	Sep 18
Manchester	Club Academy	Sep 19
Southend-on-Sea	Chinnerys	Sep 21
Cardiff	The Globe	Sep 22
Newcastle	Riverside	Sep 23
Liverpool	Hangar 34	Sep 25
Glasgow	Garage	Sep 26

NEW MODEL ARMY

Dublin	Temple Bar	Oct 1, 2
Nottingham	Rock City	Nov 26, 27
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Dec 4, 5

NHS THANKYOU CONCERT
THE WILDHEARTS, BIG COUNTRY, THE BREW, MORE

Cleethorpes	Meridian Park	Jul 31

THE NIMMO BROTHERS

Clitheroe	The Grand	Jul 13
Newbury	Arlington Arts Centre	Jul 14
Wavendon	The Stables	Jul 15

MIKE OLDFIELD'S TUBULAR BELLS IN CONCERT

London	South Bank Centre	Aug 7-15

OPETH

London	Hammersmith Apollo	Oct 16

ORANGE GOBLIN, SPIRIT ADRIFT, KING CREATURE

Buckley	Tivoli	Dec 9
Belfast	Limelight 2	Dec 10
Dublin	Grand Social	Dec 11
Glasgow	King Tut's Wah Wah Hut	Dec 13
Manchester	Gorilla	Dec 14
Birmingham	Asylum	Dec 15
Cardiff	Globe	Dec 16
London	Camden Underworld	Dec 17, 18

OZRIC TENTACLES, SILAS & SASKI

Glasgow	Mono	Dec 1
Newcastle	Cluny 2	Dec 2
Stockton-on-Tees	Georgian Theatre	Dec 3
Todmorden	Golden Lion	Dec 4
York	Fulford Arms	Dec 5
Birmingham	Hare & Hounds	Dec 6
Southampton	1865	Dec 8
Guildford	Boileroom	Dec 9
Tunbridge Wells	Forum	Dec 10
Ramsgate	Music Hall	Dec 11
Cambridge	Portland Arms	Dec 12
Brighton	Green Door Store	Dec 14
Cardiff	Globe	Dec 15
Bristol	The Exchange	Dec 16
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Dec 18
London	Islington The Lexington	Dec 19

PARADISE LOST

Leeds	Warehouse	May 1

PARTY AT THE PARK
KAISER CHIEFS, GUN, ASH, MORE

Perth	Lesser South Inch Park	Jun 26, 27

PEARL JAM

London	British Summer Time Festival	Jul 9, 10

STEPHEN DALE PETIT

London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Jul 9

THE PINEAPPLE THIEF WITH GAVIN HARRISON

Dublin	Button Factory	Oct 5
Glasgow	St Luke's Church	Oct 6
Manchester	The Ritz	Oct 7
Bristol	SWX	Oct 8
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Oct 30

PRAYING MANTIS, VAMBO

Southampton	The Brook	Oct 7
Gravesend	Red Lion	Oct 8
London	Venue TBC	Oct 9
Crumlin	The Patriot	Oct 10
Milton Keynes	Craufurd Arms	Oct 13
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Oct 14
Buckley	Tivoli	Oct 15
Cannock	The Station	Oct 16
Bradford	Nightrain	Oct 17

PRETTY BOY FLOYD

Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Aug 23
Belfast	Voodoo Lounge	Aug 25
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Aug 26
London	Camden Black Heart	Aug 27
Sheffield	Hard Rock Hell Sleaze	Aug 29

PURE REASON REVOLUTION

London	Islington Assembly Hall	Oct 17

QUEEN + ADAM LAMBERT (2022)

Manchester	Arena	May 30, 31
Glasgow	The Hydro	May Jun 2/3
London	O2 Arena	Jun 5, 6, 8, 9, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21
Birmingham	Arena	Jun 11, 12

QUIREBOYS, MASSIVE

Bristol	Thekla	Jun 4
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Jun 5
Oxford	The Bullingdon	Jun 18

KEVIN NIXON

Southend-on-Sea	Chinnerys	Jun 19
Glasgow	Garage	Oct 14
Aberdeen	Lemon Tree	Oct 15
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Nov 18
Gateshead	The Sage	Nov 19
Stoke-on-Trent	Sugarmill	Nov 20
Manchester	Academy	Nov 26
Gloucester	Guildhall	Nov 27
Brighton	Concorde 2	Jan 21
Birmingham	Institute	Jan 22

RADAR FESTIVAL
DIRTY LOOPS, HAKEN, INTERVALS, MORE

Guildford	Guildford Park	Jul 30, 31

RAMBLIN' MAN FAIR
EUROPE, MONSTER MAGNET, CLUTCH, BIG BIG TRAIN, FOGHAT, MORE

Maidstone	Mote Park	Jul 16-18

READING / LEEDS FESTIVALS
QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE, LIAM GALLAGHER, MORE

Reading	Richfield Avenue	Aug 27-29
Leeds	Braham Park	Aug 27-29

REDD KROSS

Brighton	The Albert	May 3
Bristol	The Exchange	May 4
Manchester	Deaf Institute	May 5
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	May 6
Glasgow	Broadcast	May 7
London	Islington The Lexington	May 9, 10

RHINO'S REVENGE

Barnoldswick	Music & Arts Centre	Jun 4
Kinross	Green Hotel	Jun 5
Chesterfield	Real Time Live	Jun 6
Winchester	The Railway	Jun 11
Horsham	REC Rooms	Jun 12

ROCK AND BLUES CUSTOM SHOW
MONSTER TRUCK, THOSE DAMN CROWS, MYKE GRAY FEAT KIM JENNETT, MORE

Pentrich	Coney Grey Showground	Jul 29-31

ROCK AT THE BAY
SON OF MAN, BUCK & EVANS, BUFFALO SUMMER, MORE

Swansea	Patti Pavilion	Jun 5

ROCKIN' THE BOWL
DORO, MASSIVE WAGONS, CATS IN SPACE, MORE

Sheffield	Don Valley Bowl	Sep 10-12

ROSE TATTOO

London	Islington Assembly Hall	Jul 19
Birmingham	Institute 2	Jul 20
Glasgow	SWG3	Jul 21

FRANCIS ROSSI (SPOKEN WORD)

Margate	Theatre Royal	Jun 29
Stamford	Corn Exchange	Jun 30
Ipswich	Corn Exchange	Jul 1
Corby	Cube	Jul 3
Bedford	Corn Exchange	Jul 6
Hertford	Theatre	Jul 7
Colwyn Bay	Theatre Colwyn	Jul 9
Wrexham	William Aston Hall	Jul 10
Leeds	City Varieties	Jul 11
Hull	City Hall	Jul 12
Redditch	Palace Theatre	Jul 13
Burnley	Mechanics	Jul 16
Stockport	Plaza Theatre	Jul 18
Wolverhampton	Grand Theatre	Jul 19
Lincoln	New Theatre Royal	Jul 20
Yarm	Princess Alexandra Auditorium	Jul 22
Middlesbrough	Town Hall	Jul 23
Wellingborough	Castle Theatre	Jul 24
Kettering	Lighthouse Theatre	Jul 25
Lytham St Anne's	Lowther Pavilion	Jul 26
Telford	The Place	Jul 28
Bradford	St George's Hall	Jul 29
Chesterfield	Winding Wheel	Jul 30
Scarborough	Spa Theatre	Aug 1
Newcastle	Tyne Theatre	Aug 2
Camberley	Camberley Theatre	Aug 4
Exmouth	Pavilion	Aug 5
Ilfracombe	Landmark Theatre	Aug 6
Paignton	Palace	Aug 7
Frome	Memorial Hall	Aug 8
Hereford	Courtyard	Aug 10
Treorchy	Park And Dare Theatre	Aug 11
Neath	Gwyn Hall	Aug 12
Stevenage	Gordon Craig Theatre	Aug 14
Isle Of Wight	Shanklin Theatre	Aug 15
Dorking	Dorking Halls	Aug 16
Crawley	The Hawth	Aug 17
Portsmouth	New Theatre Royal	Aug 18
Newtown	Theatre Hafren	Aug 20
Brecon	Theatr Brycheiniog	Aug 21
Aberystwyth	Arts Centre	Aug 22
Maidstone	Hazlitt Theatre	Aug 24
Runcorn	The Brindley	Aug 25
Northallerton	Forum	Aug 26

Musselburgh	Brunton	Aug 27
Dunfermline	Alhambra	Aug 28
Durham	Gala Theatre	Aug 29
Sale	Waterside Arts Centre	Sep 2
Winchester	Theatre Royal	Sep 5

JOE SATRIANI

Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Apr 30
Bexhill	De La Warr Pavilion	May 1
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	May 2
London	Palladium	May 4
Gateshead	The Sage	May 5
Glasgow	Academy	May 6

SAXON

London	Hammersmith Apollo	May 1
Glasgow	Barrowland	May 2
Manchester	Apollo	May 3

MICHAEL SCHENKER GROUP, DORO

Leeds	Academy	Oct 28
Newcastle	City Hall	Oct 29
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Oct 30
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Oct 31

KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD

Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Oct 15
Salisbury	City Hall	Oct 17
Gateshead	Tyne Theatre	Oct 19
Edinburgh	Queens Hall	Oct 20
Warrington	Parr Hall	Oct 21

SKINDRED, ROYAL REPUBLIC

Cambridge	Junction	Sep 23
Oxford	Academy	Sep 24
Northampton	Roadmender	Sep 25
Leeds	Academy	Sep 30
Birmingham	Institute	Oct 1
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Oct 2
Cardiff	Tramshed	Oct 7
Bristol	Academy	Oct 8
Nottingham	Rock City	Oct 9
Glasgow	SWG3	Oct 10
Southampton	Guildhall	Oct 15
Sheffield	Corporation	Oct 22
Newcastle	University	Oct 23
Bexhill-on-Sea	De La Warr Pavilion	Oct 29
Manchester	Academy	Oct 30
Norwich	UEA	Oct 31

SKUNK ANANSIE

Cardiff	University	Jun 7
Nottingham	Rock City	Jun 8
Lincoln	Engine Shed	Jun 9
Newcastle	Academy	Jun 11
Glasgow	Academy	Jun 13
Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	Jun 14
Norwich	UEA	Jun 15
London	Meltdown Festival	Jun 17
Sheffield	Academy	Jun 18
Birmingham	Academy 1	Jun 19
Brighton	Dome	Jun 21
Guildford	G Live	Jun 22
Folkestone	Leas Cliff Hall	Jun 23
Leeds	Academy	Jun 25
Bristol	Academy	Jun 26
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Jun 29
Leicester	Academy	Jun 30
London	Brixton Academy	Jul 2

SOS FESTIVAL
MYKE GRAY FEAT KIM JENNETT, PISTON, HANDS OFF GRETEL, MORE

Prestwich	Longfield Suite	Jul 2-4

SOUTHPORT BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
THE ANIMALS, HENRIK FREISCHLADER, KYLA BROX, MORE

Southport	The Atkinson	May 23

STEELHOUSE FESTIVAL
EUROPE, ANTHRAX, THERAPY?, H.E.A.T, MORE

Ebbw Vale	Hafod-y-Dafal Farm	Jul 23-25

STONEDEAD FESTIVAL
BLACK STAR RIDERS, H.E.A.T, GUN, TERRORVISION, MORE

Newark	Showground	Aug 28

GEOFF TATE

Belfast	Limelight	Apr 23
Dublin	Lost Lane	Apr 24
London	Camden Underworld	Apr 26
Bilston	Robin 2	Apr 27
Newcastle	Trillians	Apr 28
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Apr 29
Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	Apr 30
Inverness	Mad Hatters	May 3
Edinburgh	Bannermans Bar	May 5
Glasgow	Cathouse	May 7
Swansea	Patti Pavilion	May 9
Bournemouth	Madding Crowd	May 13
Nuneaton	Queens Hall	May 14
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	May 15

Classic Rock Recommends

RAMBLIN' MAN FAIR

Forgotten how fun festivals are? This one headed by Europe, Monster Magnet and Clutch (pictured) should remind you.

Maidstone	Mote Park	Jul 16-18

GEORGE THOROGOOD & THE DESTROYERS

Nottingham	Royal Concert Hall	Jul 23
London	Shepherds Bush Empire	Jul 25
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	Jul 26
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Jul 28
York	Barbican	Jul 30
Glasgow	SEC Armadillo	Jul 31
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Aug 1

THUNDER, UGLY KID JOE (2022)

Glasgow	Clyde Auditorium	May 21
Leeds	First Direct Arena	May 22
Cardiff	Motorpoint Arena	May 26
Birmingham	Resorts World Arena	May 27
London	Wembley Arena	May 28

THUNDERMOTHER, BETH BLADE & THE BEAUTIFUL DISASTERS

Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Sep 22
Carlisle	Brickyard	Sep 23
Bradford	Nightrain	Sep 24
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Sep 25
Newcastle	Trillians	Sep 27
London	Camden Underworld	Sep 28
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Sep 30
Buckley	Tivoli	Oct 1
Newport	Patriot	Oct 2
Plymouth	Junction	Oct 3

ROBIN TROWER, SARI SCHORR

Southampton	The Brook	Apr 21
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Apr 22
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Apr 24

URIAH HEEP

Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Sep 29
Cardiff	St David's Hall	Sep 30
London	Palladium	Oct 3
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Oct 4
Gateshead	The Sage	Oct 5
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Oct 6

VANDENBERG FEATURING RONNIE ROMERO

London	Highbury Garage	Dec 1

VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR

Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Apr 26
London	Palladium	May 3
Birmingham	Town Hall	May 4
Bath	Forum	May 5
Edinburgh	Queen's Hall	May 6

RICKY WARWICK & THE FIGHTING HEARTS, VIRGINMARYS

Cambridge	Junction	Apr 28
Norwich	Waterfront	Apr 29
Bedford	Esquires	Apr 30
Swansea	Sound Bay Festival	May 1
London	Islington Academy	May 2
Newcastle	University Students Union	May 4
Glasgow	Garage G2	May 5
Belfast	Limelight 2	May 6
Manchester	Club Academy	May 7
Carlisle	Brickyard	May 8
Buckley	Tivoli	May 9
Reading	Sub 89	May 12
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	May 13
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	May 14, 15

Leeds	Warehouse	May 16
Bournemouth	Madding Crowd	May 19
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	May 20
Lincoln	Call Of The Wild Festival	May 21

WEYFEST
MASON HILL, XANDER & THE PEACE PIRATES, ELLES BAILEY, MORE

Farnham	Rural Life Living Museum	Aug 20-22

WHITBY BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL
THE ANIMALS, HENRIK FREISCHLADER, KYLA BROX, MORE

Whitby	Pavilion	May 22

THE WHITE BUFFALO, LA EDWARDS

Bristol	Academy	Apr 19
London	Kentish Town Forum	Apr 20
Manchester	The Ritz	Apr 22
Newcastle	Academy	Apr 23
Liverpool	Arts Club	Apr 24
Glasgow	Academy	Apr 26
Birmingham	Institute	Apr 27

THE WILDHEARTS

Cardiff	Tramshed	Sep 3
Bristol	SWX	Sep 4
Exeter	Phoenix Arts Centre	Sep 5
Frome	Cheese & Grain	Sep 6
Manchester	Academy 2	Sep 8
London	Camden Electric Ballroom	Sep 9
Norwich	Waterfront	Sep 10
Brighton	Chalk	Sep 11
Bournemouth	Madding Crowd	Sep 12
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Sep 15
Gloucester	Guildhall	Sep 16
Newcastle	Boiler House	Sep 17
Leeds	Stylus	Sep 18
Galashiels	Mac Arts	Sep 20
Stirling	Tolbooth	Sep 21
Aberdeen	Lemon Tree	Sep 22
Sheffield	Foundry	Sep 24
Southampton	Engine Rooms	Sep 25

Recommended

STEVEN WILSON

Cardiff	St David's Hall	Sep 8
Sheffield	City Hall	Sep 9
Manchester	Apollo	Sep 11
Glasgow	Concert Hall	Sep 12
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Sep 13
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Sep 15
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Sep 16
Nottingham	Royal Concert Hall	Sep 17

TO BE RETAINED ISSUED SUBJECT TO THE CONDITIONS ON BACK

YES

Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	May 16
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	May 17
York	Barbican	May 19
Gateshead	The Sage	May 20
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	May 22
Nottingham	Royal Concert Hall	May 23
London	Royal Albert Hall	May 24
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	May 28

MARIE KORNER

DeWolff

Studio Tivoli Vredenburg, Utrecht, Netherlands

Pandemic-defying album launch livestream rocks big time.

★ DeWolff should be on the road, but instead the core trio of Pablo and Luka van de Poel, guitar and drums, respectively, and Robin Piso on Hammond are taking their time-travelling psychedelic rock'n'roll show into fans' homes. Everything from the stage design to the 4:3 aspect ratio is focused on evoking a TV broadcast circa 1971, and the result is fab, man.

Unsurprisingly the vast chunk of the 90-minute set is from new album *WolffPack*, alongside a handful from recent albums *Tascam Tapes* and *Thrust*. And an array of guests fill out the stage line-up and sound to impressive effect. Top tunes including the funky Black Crowes-y *R U My Savior?*, *Half Of Your Love* and *It Ain't Easy* go lusciously disco with lashings of glitterball, and a mulleted Arthur Akkermans (from touring buddies the Grand East) brings a heap of absurdly sub-Jagger strutting and bang-on blues harp to *Buckshot Baby*. Towards the end the band ratchet up the intensity with some absolutely ripping lead guitar during *Made It To 27*, and a jousting Hammond organ and guitar duel for closer *Nothing's Changing*. A truly killer lockdown live set and no mistake.

Essi Berelian

Destruction

Z7 Konzertfabrik, Pratteln, Switzerland

Two straight hours of relentless Teutonic thrash.

★ For devotees of German thrash metal, it's a joy that its Big Three bands Kreator, Destruction and Sodom are not only still making music and playing shows but also doing so in a thoroughly convincing manner.

Not even the pandemic can stop Destruction tonight, as they play a big, empty venue with a full stage production, broadcasting across the globe to payers. Technically the stream goes smoothly, and VIP ticket holders also get to see brief backstage interviews.

A two-hour thrash set might normally outstay its welcome, but after nine months of virtually no live action this one feels like a feast. The band revisit most phases of their 39-year career, from the first mini-album's *Total Desaster* (sic), through such early classics as *Curse The Gods* and *Life Without Sense*, plus rarely played technical work-outs *Reject Emotions* and *Sign Of Fear*, all the way through to post-millennial highlights like profane anthem *Nailed To The Cross* and the pounding title-track of the band's most recent record, 2018's *Born To Perish*.

This jubilant event effectively makes the case that online shows could remain a valid thing even post-pandemic. Admittedly the lack of applause inevitably feels weird, but bass-toting frontman Schmier wisely addresses online viewers rather than some imaginary concert audience. Back on the plus side, the toilet queues are virtually non-existent.

Jason Arnopp

'DeWolff deliver a truly killer lockdown live set and no mistake.'

SATELLITE JUNE/PRESS

DeWolff party like it's 1971, with guest Arthur Akkermans (bottom left) from touring buddies the Grand East making moves like Jagger.

Nebula

Mojave Desert, California, USA

Desert rock incarnate from stalwart stoners on home soil.

★ A band that have always sounded like they reside in some sun-scorched, cactus-strewn freak commune, Nebula were custom-built to perform in the Mojave Desert. Sweetly edited to exclude the technological glitches that often turn such things into a chore, this lengthy live show captures the Californians in their natural habitat, unleashing waves of swaggering, red-eyed fuzz into the haze of dusk. With a few choice visual effects and the natural sunlit ambience of their surroundings adding plenty of lysergic atmosphere, the whole thing amounts to a straightforward invitation to get full-on stoned and nod your head for an hour or so.

Opening with a suitably monstrous and bleary version of the title song from their debut album *To The Center,* frontman Eddie Glass and his laconic bandmates are clearly on great form and revelling in the opportunity to crank up to earth-rattling volume. With a set taken largely from 2018's excellent *Holy Shit* album, and what seem to be some thrilling new songs thrown in, it's the kind of live stream that will ensure that sensible people continue to pine for the chance to watch a band play in a garden shed, let alone a desert.

Dom Lawson

The Besnard Lakes

Breakglass Studios, Montreal, Canada

Space rockers go into interstellar overdrive performing their new album.

★ The debut live performance of brand new material by any band is enough to strike trepidation into the heart of even the most dedicated fan. That's especially the case with Canadian cosmonauts the Besnard Lakes, a band whose glorious music properly begins to reveal itself only after repeated listens. And with new album, *The Besnard Lakes Are The Last of the Great Thunderstorm Warnings*, already a week old, the real joy is in seeing how it takes on a whole new life when played live in its entirety.

Here the band get to fulfil their ambition of playing the record as a continuous suite of music as originally intended. Augmented by a horn section, *Raindrops* lives up to its widescreen promise as gurgling keyboards, EBowed guitars and divine vocal harmonies coalesce to create an ecstatic sense of wonder, while laser beams float gently across the studio, slicing through the plumes of smoke.

Although the music has been inspired by meditations on mortality, the Besnard Lakes are far from maudlin. Witness the tempered yet marvellous glam stomp of *Our Heads, Our Hearts On Fire Again* and the uplifting nature of *New Revolution*.

With a performance that is utterly sublime throughout, the Besnard Lakes not only make the return of live concerts even more desirable, they also stake a very convincing claim for being the Pink Floyd of the 21st century.

Julian Marszalek

The Soundtrack Of My Life

Eric Bloom

The Blue Öyster Cult frontman on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Dave Ling**

Born in Brooklyn, New York and raised in the neighbouring borough of Queens, Eric Bloom became co-lead guitarist, frontman, keyboard player and songwriter with hard rockers Blue Öyster Cult in April 1969. Over the following half-century he has been an ever-present member of BÖC, performing on all 15 of their studio albums, including their 1976 now-classic hit *(Don't Fear) The Reaper.*

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

My earliest memories of music go back to listening to AM radio at home in New York. The first actual song I have recognition of is Elvis singing *Heartbreak Hotel*. I'm guessing it would have been in 1956 or 1957, and I was ten years old.

THE FIRST SONG I PERFORMED LIVE

It would have been something by one of the British invasion bands. My first band was in 1965, so it's likely to have been *You Really Got Me* [by The Kinks] or *I Saw Her Standing There* [The Beatles].

BEST LIVE BAND

The original Alice Cooper group. We toured with Alice Cooper in 1972, and they were innovators in terms of clothing, lighting and presentation. Their show totally enthralled an audience.

THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

Are You Experienced by the Jimi Hendrix Experience. By mid-1967, Jimi had released several singles, and when his debut album came out *everyone* bought it. It took the world by storm. I'd also put the first albums by Cream and The Doors in the same category, but *Are You Experienced* just about wins.

THE SINGER

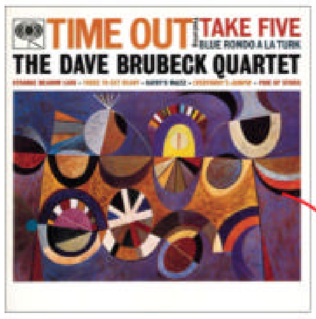
Maybe he wasn't the purest of vocalists, but for an overall rock'n'roll singer it can only be John Lennon. Some had better voices and others a superior style, but for me he could sing a rock song like nobody else.

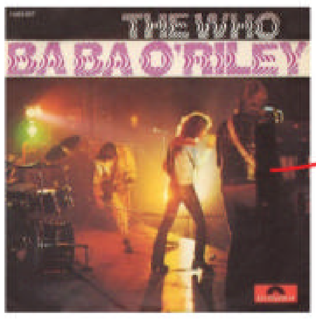
THE GUITAR HERO

I've total respect for Jimi and his contemporaries, but I'm going with Prince. The guy was a fantastic guitar player but he wasn't really known for that level of ability. People knew him more as a showman, also for his songwriting and performance, but Prince was an *amazing* guitar player. It's a shame that those other attributes overshadowed his musicianship.

THE SONGWRITER

I'm acknowledging the totality of this person's work – how much I liked what they did, and how much of it there was. John Lennon tops that list. But equal – and not below him – is Smokey Robinson. Besides his own hits such as *The Tracks Of My Tears*, Smokey wrote for others, including *My Guy* by Mary Wells.





THE MOST UNDERRATED BAND EVER

I really love King's X. They did get to experience some success, but in my view they deserved much, much more.

THE BEST RECORD I'VE MADE

I'm very fond of our latest album *The Symbol Remains*, but overall it would probably be *Secret Treaties* [1974]. That was our third studio record, and each did better than the one before. I know through talking to the fans that it's their favourite, and we have played most of its songs live. It seems to be the fruition of our songwriting during that particular era.

THE WORST RECORD I'VE MADE

This is a personal choice, but for me Blue Öyster Cult's least satisfying record was *Mirrors* [1979]. We made it with [producer] Tom Werman, who had had a lot of success with Cheap Trick, and thought we were taking on a hit maker. But for one reason or another Werman did not care for my vocals and kept me out of the studio. I don't recall how many tracks I got to sing [*It was three - Ed*]. He just didn't want me around.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE

The first album I ever purchased, *Time Out* by [jazz band] the Dave Brubeck Quartet. It was just what was hip to buy in 1959, and I do enjoy that kind of music. I also like jazz-fusion; artists like [guitarist] Al Di Meola.

THE ANTHEM

It can only be *Baba O'Riley* by The Who [1971]. Even after all these years those chords get me every time. I could have answered each of these questions with responses from The Who, because I'm a huge Who fan. Who's to say that Pete Townshend shouldn't have been my best guitar player, and writer, and the best *everything*?!

MY SATURDAY NIGHT/PARTY SONG

Bang The Drum All Day by Todd Rundgren. I don't go out on a Saturday night, I'm usually working, but for your purposes that's the one that gets me in the mood to have fun.

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME CRY

That one requires a great deal of thought… There are songs that get me misty-eyed, but I'll be the only person to respond with a song by Frank Sinatra: *It Was A Very Good Year.*

MY 'IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE' SONG

I'm going to take you way back, before people met on the internet and even before the sexual revolution. What they did was put on a Johnny Mathis album. If you were having a 'make-out' party, somebody would always put on Johnny Mathis.

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

You'd think it would be *(Don't Fear) The Reaper*, wouldn't you? But I don't intend to have music at all. Just close family and a private graveside service.

Blue Öyster Cult's latest album The Symbol Remains is available via Frontiers Records.

"People knew him more as a showman, but Prince was an *amazing* guitar player."

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